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S E R M O N S,

BY THE LATE

RIGHT REVEREND

K
JOHN HINCHLIFFE, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR R. FAULDER, NEW BOND STREET.

1796.



TO
HIS GRACE
THE DUKE OF GRAFTON,
THESE SERMONS
ARE DEDICATED,
AS A TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE AND RESPECT,
BY HIS GRACE'S
MOST FAITHFUL HUMBLE SERVANT,
HENRY JOHN HINCHLIFFE.

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AND DEDICATED

AS A TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE AND RESPECT

TO HIS GRACE

MOST REVEREND HENRY JOHN HINCHELLE

HENRY JOHN HINCHELLE

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SERMON I.

FIRST EPISTLE *to the* CORINTHIANS,

Chapter ii. Verse 7.

*We speak the Wisdom of God in a Mystery,
even the hidden Wisdom, which God or-
dained before the World unto our Glory.*

CHRIST JESUS, who of God was made unto us *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*, was the gospel which St. Paul declares he was sent to preach, not, as he acknowledges, in the wisdom of words, or of men, but *in a Mystery*, in the power of God.

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That,

That, notwithstanding the forfeiture of our first parents, God would pardon sin, and restore the penitent offender to a state of acceptance, that he would admit our sincere though imperfect endeavours after righteousness, and reward them with eternal glory, was what *eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither could it have entered into the heart of man to conceive*, otherwise than as God has been pleased to reveal it to us by his spirit.

Ill then would it become us, with the vain spirit of speculative curiosity, to pry into the means whereby this stupendous act of mercy is accomplished, or to question their propriety.

Can we look back into the abyss of eternity, and there discern the councils of the Almighty determined before the world began?—Can we stretch our eye beyond the vault of heaven, and penetrate into the completion of his will, when this earth, and that heaven shall be no more?—Then might we hope *by searching to find out*

out God, and understand to perfection that mystery of our redemption, which the *very angels are desirous to look into*, and unable to comprehend.

But what presumption is it, for any man in the conceit of worldly wisdom to reject at once the gospel of Christ with impious contempt, or with an affectation of philosophic indifference, merely because he does not see, or is unable to account for, the hidden purposes of God.

Let reason first exert her powers in examining with precision, but with candour, the authorities of that evidence, to which the Christian revelation appeals.—Let the scriptures be searched for the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the strictest inquiry be made, what ground there is to suppose, they were fabricated after the event.—Let it be examined, whether they apply to the person of Christ, or if we ought still to look for their completion.

Let reason review the history of our Saviour's miracles, and the proofs of his resurrection ; but let not these evidences be set aside, in order to question, whether he that first ordained can alter the course of nature. It is preposterous to determine, that the belief of no miracle can be established, merely because a miracle contradicts the general tenor of past experience.

Let reason consider also the doctrines of the Christian revelation ; let her judge of their fitness to promote the happiness of individuals, and the interests of society ; let her compare them with the nature, and the condition, the hopes, and fears of men ; but let not the force of these several, and united arguments be rejected without examination, as if the subject were of so little importance, as not to be worth an inquiry. A wilful ignorance of what may be learned, cannot be justified by our inability to comprehend what it is not given for man to know.

We

We are capable of judging how far the declared purpose of God's will is fulfilled, or not, but we are in no wise competent to determine what are the necessary, or proper means of accomplishing it. We misapply, therefore, and abuse the gift of our faculties, in presuming to bring under the scrutiny of our judgment, the propriety of God's councils, or the fitness of the instruments he employs.

A fuller insight than what we now have into the purposes, and execution of the divine will may probably make a part of that happiness and glory which are reserved for *the spirits of just men made perfect*, but at present we see *as through a glass darkly*, and many things in the mystery of our redemption are hard to be understood, even by those who are favoured with the light of revelation in its greatest brightness and purity. The knowledge, however, which is imparted to us in the Gospel, is sufficient to make us *wise unto*

salvation, and fully will it justify the dealings of God with the sons of men.

Without affecting, therefore, to be wise *above what is written*, I shall briefly submit to your review the doctrine of man's redemption through Jesus Christ, as delivered to us in the holy scriptures.

We learn thence, that ere the foundations of the world were laid, part of the heavenly host rebelled against God, and were driven out from his presence under all the horrors of guilt and vengeance. We know but little of the circumstances of their crime, still less of the place and manner of their punishment; this only is clear, that they offended God, and thereby became miserable. Tradition charges them with pride; it was probably, therefore, a consciousness of the high dignity in which they were placed, and of the immortality conferred upon their nature, which betrayed them into the forgetfulness that they were not independent;—But be their
crime

crime what it may, it lost them their first estate.

When it afterwards pleased God to create man, instead of admitting him at once to a state of glory, he placed him upon the earth, in a course of probation, where he might first give a proof of his obedience, and learn to acknowledge a dependance on his Maker for whatever he might enjoy here, or hope for hereafter.

In the visible scene of creation there was originally a subordination of the several parts, and consequently different degrees of excellence, so God intended, and approved it as formed agreeably to the purpose of his unsearchable wisdom. Man, therefore, in this sense, was good, not as endowed with absolute perfection, but coming from the hands of his Maker conformable to his design, and as yet free from actual guilt. The possibility of transgression was nevertheless inherent in his nature; for, though God might certainly have given a bias to his will, which would

forcibly have attracted him towards virtue, and have secured obedience ; yet such an influence (unless the want of it were first acknowledged, and the gift sought for on his part) was altogether inconsistent with, and destructive of man's free agency.

From that state of primitive innocence in which he was created, our first parent soon fell by disobedience to a positive command ; he trusted more to his own imagination, and the flattering suggestions of the tempter, than to the express authority of God, which had threatened, that * *In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. He nevertheless did eat, and thereby forfeited for himself and his posterity whatever claim of eternal glory, an unerring obedience might have given him on the justice of God. His guilt brought upon him the sentence of mortality, and he was doomed with the other creatures around him, to a temporary existence, and certain dissolution.

* Gen. ii. 17.

Had the human race been left desperate under this condemnation, *better certainly would it have been not to have given the earth unto Adam, or else when it was given him, to have restrained him from sinning, for what profit is it for men, now in this present time to live in heaviness, and after death to look for punishment?*

But dark as the prospect is to the unassisted eye of reason, there is still a ray of light, beaming forth upon it, from the sun of righteousness, and shewing us the way to escape from that misery into which mankind had fallen.

Admitting then that God did foreknow, and knowing did permit the fall of man; yet he foreknew likewise, and had preordained his redemption through Jesus Christ.

From the foundation of the world was it decreed, that the Son of God should, at the appointed time, take upon him the nature of man. It was in the conduct of this gracious design, that Divine Providence

dence selected the descendants of Abraham from the nations of the earth, and by a peculiar system of laws, and ceremonial observances, kept them a distinct, and separate people. In succeeding ages, the tribe and particular family, from which the Messiah should spring, the time, and place of his birth were distinctly marked out. At length the Saviour of Mankind appeared, agreeably to all the circumstances which had been foretold concerning him ; in the course of his ministry, he displayed his divine commission in acts of miraculous benevolence ; he gave feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind, the deaf heard his voice, and the tongue of the dumb sang his praises. Having thus, in numberless instances surpassing the power of human agency, established his divine character, he fulfilled the grand purpose of his incarnation, submitted to the death of the cross, and thereby restored mankind to that conditional state of acceptance, which the transgression of our first parent had forfeited ;

feited; *So, as in Adam all died, in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Life and Immortality, therefore, man has no claim to, either as a natural right, or as a reward of merit, it is the free gift of God's mercy.

A just sense of this truth has a direct tendency to humble the heart of man, and to cast down every high thought which might exalt itself against the sovereign majesty of God.

Let the doctrine of man's fall in Adam, and his redemption by the cross of Christ, be to the Jews a scandal, offensive to their prejudices because contradictory to their vain expectations of a Messiah in the character of an earthly conqueror. Let the notion of a dying Saviour be folly to philosophers of Greece, and a derision to all the vain conceits of worldly wisdom. Let the profligate, and the inconsiderate part of mankind openly profane, or secretly slight our faith, yet to men who sensible of their own insufficiency and unworthiness

things walk humbly with their God, the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of atonement in Christ Jesus must ever be a doctrine full of comfort and joy.

It was my design in this discourse to lay before you, in one general view, the great outline of the plan of Providence, which was gradually unfolding, from the creation of man to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this, as in every other dispensation of divine wisdom respecting the moral or material world, there is evidently a chain of causes and effects, though we cannot distinctly discern every link that connects them together. Great it must still be confessed is the mystery of our redemption; the counsels, like the throne of the Almighty, are encompassed with clouds of darkness impenetrable to vain curiosity. We may not yet fully comprehend the means, but the light of revelation has, nevertheless, afforded us such an insight into the gracious design, and effects of divine wisdom in the redemption of mankind

kind by Jesus Christ, as sufficiently proves the Christian Religion to be a consistent uniform dispensation, reconciling the divine attributes of justice and mercy, *bringing peace to men on earth*, and opening to them the way of eternal glory in the life to come.

Let us not then idly dispute about the nature, and propriety of the means whereby we are restored to the divine favour, but apply the comfortable assurance of mercy to our hearts, and let it excite there just sentiments of love, gratitude, and adoration.

To all such as, sensible of their own unworthiness, turn unto the Lord in humility, repentance, and amendment of life, the Gospel of Christ, expressly and clearly assures forgiveness through his mediation; and for our encouragement also to future obedience, he who hath so reconciled us unto God hath promised to perfect the work of our salvation, assisting our endeavours,

deavours, and sanctifying our hearts, by the grace of his holy spirit.

The vain conceit of worldly wisdom may affect also to treat with scorn all notions of divine influence on the heart of man ; yet the grace of God ceaseth not, but co-operating with the will of the humble believer will *help his unbelief*, and lead him on from truth to truth, adding conviction to faith, and confidence to hope, until nothing doubting, he embraces with joy and gratitude the gift of eternal life, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON II.

The FOURTH PSALM, Verse 4.

Commune with your own Heart.

WHAT passeth in a man's own breast, is, of all the scenes of human observation, the most interesting, though generally the least attended to.

It is our common practice to seek both for instruction and entertainment from the various objects that surround us, and we give credit to the hasty report of our senses, without attending to the still small voice of reason, or the more distinct admonitions of conscience.

Reason

Reason is, nevertheless, the pride of man, the boasted distinction of his excellence. It has pleased the all-wise author of our being, to implant it in the human breast, as the test whereby we may examine, and approve or condemn, whatever our senses or imagination represent as desirable.

What reason is with respect to good and evil, conscience, in the common acceptation of the term, is with respect to right and wrong; both are, in some degree, active qualities of the mind, which are capable of being heightened and improved by exercise; both will suffer and be impaired by neglect.

“Commune with your own heart,” is, therefore a precept which I mean to recommend to you as conducive to your moral and religious improvement.

Inconsiderateness is, at present, among the principal causes of irreligion. Some few there may be, who, against the light of reason and revelation, and in open defiance of God, sin, as it were, with a high hand; yet

yet characters of such decided guilt are certainly not common.—Ours is an age of levity and dissipation, and I am persuaded, it may as truly, as charitably be supposed, that far the greater number of sinners offend rather through inattention, than presumption.

The bulk of mankind are engaged in the pursuits of ambition, interest, or pleasure, little regarding the nature of their actions in any other view than as they appear conducive to the attainment of their object. In the hurry of public life, the mind finds as little inclination, as leisure to attend to what is not immediately in view ; the cares or the pleasures of the world strike in with every thought, while the numerous examples of folly which present themselves on all occasions, give a kind of sanction to it, and are made an apology even for vice itself.

Should thoughts of a serious tendency accidentally obtrude themselves upon the worldly, gay, and luxurious man, they

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ever appear unseasonable, impertinent, and irksome; prepossessed with a persuasion, that the indulgence of them would lead to melancholy, he instantly treats them as Felix did St. Paul, when his conscience took the alarm, *Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee*; but least such a season should come, recourse is had again to dissipation, and should folly be found insufficient to drive away reflection, it is too frequently effected by intemperance.

It is no easy task, therefore, to persuade a man in the vigour of health, and the cheerful flow of youthful spirits, while his passions urge him on to the gratification of sense, while the world promises fair, and his imagination heightens the delusion, it is, I say, no easy matter to persuade him, that it is as necessary for man to think, as it is, to act.

The young and inexperienced rush eagerly on in the beaten track of folly and extravagance, without, so much
as

as knowing or inquiring where it will lead to.

It rarely, indeed, happens, but that in the vicissitude of human affairs, they meet with some circumstance or other of difficulty or disappointment, which checks their career, and brings them back, for a moment, to the right use of their understanding ; in such an interval of reflection, there is hardly any man who does not acknowledge, on the whole, the vanity of earthly pursuits, and think it highly proper that he should, some time or other, state a just account between his hopes and his fears on the subject of eternity ; but what usually prevents the good effect of these accidental dispositions, is the irksomeness of inquiring particularly into an account, which shews, at first sight, a ballance not in his favour, but above all, an unwillingness to correct the errors which occasion it.

Hence it is, that so many presume on life, as a spendthrift does on his fortune, if there is but enough for the present

occasion, they content themselves with making a vague resolution, that whenever it draws near an end, they will take up, and manage the remainder of it better.

Such conduct, however, as to our temporal concerns, is, in the common opinion of mankind, regarded as folly or madness. With what consideration and foresight do men act, what impatience, what anxiety do they shew in procuring an establishment for themselves and their families ; yet, unaccountable as it may seem, but a comparative few are found to act on like principles of common prudence in the more important concerns of eternity.

Comes this inattention to the future from an opinion that the things of this life, are of more value than those of another ? This, indeed, appears to be a very common conclusion, and what most men adopt without reflection. The happiness of a future state is seen as through an inverted telescope, which shews it at once diminished, and removed to a greater distance than

than in fact it is ; while whatever is desirable in this world, is viewed in a way that magnifies its worth, far beyond its real proportion. Here lies the error, but men are hardly persuaded to guard against a deceit, wherein they take pleasure, or find at least their present ease and satisfaction.

Such, however, as will be brought to reflect at all, cannot but be convinced, that after the course of a very few years, all that now possess the earth must pass away, like the millions which are gone already. Reason suggests the probability of a future state, Revelation declares the certainty of a resurrection to judgment.—Under this conviction, what solid foundation, is there for peace, comfort, and satisfaction, if it is not to be met with in our own breast ?

There alone is to be found that faithful monitor, which we shall do well to consult upon all occasions. Conscience so long as we are disposed to attend to it, will warn us of every danger ; even though

we persist to oppose its influence, it will for a while remonstrate, then reproach, condemn, and punish; still, however, through every stage of guilt, even when it may appear to have forsaken us, it is still near at hand, and ever true to our interest. Happy, indeed, is he, and he only can be truly and permanently happy, whose conscience speaks peace to him; such a man is possessed of a treasure, which the world can neither give nor take away.

Be, then, the condition of any man what it may.—Is he just entering on the public scene of temptation and danger? or having long trodden in the path of guilt, is he about to take his final leave of the world? The precept of my text is still applicable to him. The young and innocent cannot be acquainted too soon with his own heart, in order to acquire some fixed principles of virtue and religion, which may regulate his future conduct; nor while it pleaseth God to defer the fatal blow, is it too late for the aged to repent.

Thus

Thus much on the necessity of communing with our own heart. I shall add a few words on the manner of doing it, and suggest such subjects of meditation, as may properly and advantageously engage your serious attention.

The Psalmist, in the verse from whence the text is taken, recommends retirement and silence; some men, indeed, may be able at all times, and in all places, to recollect themselves, and retire, as it were, into their own breast; but this degree of self-command requires such a habit of reflection as but few are known to attain. The generality of us find it difficult to restrain the mind from wandering, even in the most serious acts of duty; involuntary ideas float on the imagination, and interrupt our devotions, even when there is no external object to seduce the attention. It is prudent, therefore, to take advantage frequently of retirement and privacy, to assist us against our infirmity, and occasions will not be wanting to those who are

inclined to profit by them, of communing with their own heart without any material interruption to the ordinary concerns, or recreations of life.

The silence recommended by the Psalmist, is conformable to what our Saviour taught his disciples ; not to use vain repetitions. True devotion comes not so much from the lips as the heart ; the chief design and use of language is to convey our ideas to other men, not either to God or ourselves. Our heavenly Father knoweth all our thoughts long before we can utter them ; few words, therefore, are needful either in our meditations, or our prayers. The silent admiration of the divine attributes, the broken sigh of a contrite spirit, or the unuttered effusions of a grateful heart, will plead in our behalf at the mercy seat of God, beyond all the studied grace of eloquence.

Among the subjects proper to exercise our mind upon, there is hardly any to be found of greater efficacy in disposing it to
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virtue, than the shortness and uncertainty of human life. I am well aware that to men unaccustomed to such a reflection, nothing can appear a more unwelcome and melancholy consideration; who has not frequently heard it observed, as a circumstance which in some degree alleviates the many evils incident to our condition, that the apprehension of what is sure to happen, should occur so seldom as it does?

No consideration, however, can more effectually dispose us to moderate our worldly cares, or regulate our affections; it lightens also the weight of affliction, by convincing us that our present evils are but of short duration, and by directing our hopes to the more lasting happiness of another life.

The being and attributes of God are likewise, subjects most interesting to us, and every way worthy of our frequent meditation. The more we think of God, the more must we love and adore him, and delight in so doing.

Who

Who can reflect on the almighty power, the infinite justice, and the awful presence of God, and not be disposed to behave towards him in a manner suitable to his dignity? Can we be mindful that *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?* and not aspire after a state of purity and perfection. Who can be sensible of the divine mercy in redeeming us from the condemnation of sin, and not feel *his heart burn within him*, while he communes with it on the love of God, till the fire of devotion is kindled, and breaks forth in effusions of praise and thanksgiving.

On these and such like meditations we shall do well to dwell frequently, till we can both relish and retain them. Practice will, in a short time, make them familiar and pleasing to us, till at length the happy influence of some religious motive will, under the blessing of God, be found ever near at hand, whereby we may be enabled to regulate and subdue our inordinate affections.

It

It is, indeed, much to be wished, that men would make it their daily practice to dedicate some few moments when they rise to devout meditation and prayers, nor ought it ever to be omitted at the hour of rest, to close the day, by recollecting how we have passed it. We are daily contracting guilt, and many things which ought to be repented of, may escape our notice, and hereafter swell the account against us, if not attended to, and corrected in time.

If what has been said on this subject, has had the desired effect of disposing you, to form a resolution of acquainting yourselves with God and your own conscience; leave not such a disposition behind you at the Church, but carry it with you to your chamber, and your pillow. Let the thought of God, and your duty towards him be henceforth ever present with you night and morning. Make but a trial of this plain and simple remedy, you will soon find it operate in every circumstance of your lives, and diffuse its influence over
all.

all your actions. Your conduct will be every day more and more conformable to the precepts of the Gospel, and if haply through infirmity, or accident you err from them, the return will be easy, and without delay.

SERMON III.

EPISTLE of ST. JAMES,

Chapter iv. Verses 13, 14, 15.

Go to now, Ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

EVER since the creation of the world, the constant succession of mankind has
kept

kept an equal pace with the flow of time, one generation has passed away, and another has risen up in its place, each year, and day making some change or other in the temporary possessors of the earth.

View the sepulchres of the Great, the Wealthy, and the Wise; what do all the splendid titles without, more than mark that such men have existed? Within is to be found the sum of all human excellence, Dust and Bones.

That we too must follow the generations of our forefathers, is a truth obvious from the history of every people, and confirmed too by the evidence of our own daily observation; so familiar, indeed, are the proofs, from their frequency, that we give them but a momentary attention.

We feel, for a while, the particular loss of a relation or friend, but overlook without concern or application, the general certainty and awfulness of death itself.

Nor is this to be wondered at, when we contemplate the bulk of mankind, engaged

gaged so busily as they are in the various pursuits of this transitory life. Projects of gain, honour, or pleasure, find a place in every man's breast; even they whose necessities oblige them to rise early, and late take rest, in order to provide themselves, and their families with a scanty portion of daily bread, even they, the prudent and sober part at least, have some more distant object in view to which they press forward, in hopes by the acquisition, to obtain a favourable change in their circumstances and situation.

The prevalence of this expectation, is still more conspicuous in the higher gradations of society; nor is the human mind less impelled by imaginary than real wants. Be the circumstances, or situation in life, ever so favourable, be the present time gratified by all the enjoyments of health, affluence, and honours, still nevertheless there appears in the generality of men something wanting to fill up the measure of their content, which they endeavour to supply

supply by the pursuit of a distant object. So that it seems to be the natural lot of man, through the whole course of his existence to depend for great part of his satisfaction upon futurity.

But, admitting the fact, as it is here stated, and that men are so formed as ever to have in view the attainment of some greater good than what they actually possess. It may not unreasonably be asked, Where is the guilt or folly in indulging the hope of future advantages, and endeavouring to acquire them, provided the means employed are free from fraud, injustice, or oppression? Is it not a disposition both useful and laudable to be anxious for the future welfare of ourselves and our families?

There is nothing in the passage of my text which can justly be construed to imply censure on a proper regard to our own temporal concerns; nor is there the least reason to suppose that the Apostle meant to discourage either prudence in the manage-

nagement of our fortune, or activity in carrying into execution our lawful designs for its improvement.

True religion neither drives us to the desert, nor to the cloister ; nor is it necessary that in order to be Christians we must cease to be men. Wealth, power, and honours in the prospect of life may reasonably stimulate and encourage us to action, in the several departments we are qualified to fill, without the imputation of avarice, or unwarrantable ambition.

The purpose of the Apostle is, to repress the rage of an immoderate attachment to the things of this life ; but principally to reprove the presumption of such as plan their worldly schemes without properly considering their dependance upon the providence and favour of God.

Were men but candidly inclined to acknowledge the fallacy of those arguments whereby they find pleasure in being deceived ; we need but refer them to the light of nature, for the discovery of their folly,

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in setting too high a value on the objects of their ordinary pursuits.

Reason, unassisted by revelation, has shewn with the force of truth and wisdom, the vanity of an excessive fondness for any thing which this world has to give, as well from the uncertainty of life as from the precarious duration and variable influence of the objects themselves.

The Apostle insists only on the first of these considerations ; it is, indeed, alone sufficient to establish the charge both of folly and presumption on the vain boasting of those, who, confident either in the security of their existence, or success, say, *To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain : Ye know not, says he, what shall be on the morrow ; For what is your life ? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and vanisheth away.*

This plain reflection, obvious as it is to the understanding, is, nevertheless, with difficulty brought home to the heart, we
readily

readily admit its truth, without adopting it as a principle to influence our conduct. But of what avail is it that we are convinced of its truth, while it remains only a matter of barren speculation? To what purpose are we persuaded, we must surely die, unless we are instructed thereby how we ought to live? *Ye know not what shall be on the morrow*, the present day may be the last, *this night thy soul be required of thee*. Instead, then, of anxiously attending to distant projects, which may possibly never be accomplished at all, and if they should, may produce consequences the very reverse of what was expected from them, ought it not rather to be our first care, to secure the moments as they pass, and to make such use of the time present, that we may ever be prepared for an event which we know sooner or later will surely happen, and for ought any of us can tell, may happen before the morrow.

But, if folly and presumption be justly chargeable upon those who speak of their

plans, as if they had an absolute property in the time to come, even when the objects they have in view, are in their nature not only lawful, but commendable, what must we think of their levity, who have no higher pursuits, than the vanities of dress, equipage, and dissipation? And with how much greater severity might the Apostle have reproved the arrogance of others, whose end proposed, is in itself criminal, and the means of attaining it, base and wicked?

The text I have chosen, having censured the vain spirit of confidence, furnishes us in the latter part of it with a rule of conduct at once applicable to our undertakings, our condition, and our duty. *Ye ought to say, if the Lord will, ye shall live, and do this, or that.*

No consideration can be more efficacious in correcting the nature of our desires, than that which takes into their first formation the concurrence of God's will; such a connection of thought must act on
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the mind impressed with it, as the most peremptory restraint against all schemes of violence, fraud, or impurity. If our design be of such a complexion or tendency, that it will not bear to have prefixed this qualifying introduction, "*if the Lord will*," conscience cannot, in a more distinct manner, declare against it; it ought at once to be abandoned.

Nor is it sufficient that what we propose be in itself innocent, the means employed in its execution, or the end we have in view, may still render it criminal; "*If the Lord will*," is, therefore, as applicable to the furtherance of our design, and the consequences of it, as to his permission for our undertaking it at all.

Sin, like the fruit which tempted Eve, may appear pleasing to the eye, and if we listen to the suggestion, that its consequences are remote, or uncertain, our seduction is easy; let its real quality be brought at once to the test of its correspondence

with God's pleasure, it will then instantly start forth in its natural deformity.

Nor less suitable to our condition, as transitory and dependent beings, is the precept of my text, which inculcates resignation to the will of God.

The *issues of life* are in the hands of our Creator. How many have perished in the weakness of infancy! How many have been cut off in the vigour of youth and manhood! and even those who have attained the full measure of old age, have upon the review found the term of life but as a span long—as a vapour it hath vanished away.

Fearful and melancholy as death may appear to men unaccustomed to reflect upon it willingly; a sense of guilt only, or an inordinate attachment to the things of this life, exhibit it surrounded with horrors.

It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that frail and imperfect as human nature is,
and

and sensible as the very best among us must be, how far they fall short of unerring obedience, the prospect into that scene which lies beyond the grave, though illumined by the chearful rays of light Christianity has diffused upon it, must still be solemn and awful; nor can we look forward to the separation from all we hold dear to us, which is surely, and shortly to take place, (though but for a season) without yielding to the tender concern, and affections of humanity; the more, however, we are prepared to expect the loss, the less grievous will it be to us, and by accustoming the mind to contemplate death at a distance, we shall find on his nearer approach, that he is disarmed of all his terrors.

A submissive resignation to the disposal of God's providence, is a matter of duty also, as we are altogether dependent upon his power, goodness, and mercy for all we have, and all we hope for. *What, indeed, have we that we have not received? Now if*

we have received it, why boast we, as if we had received it not?

Whatever, therefore, O man, may be thy lot in life, remember, that it is a trial imposed upon thy humility, or thy patience. Has God blessed thee with riches and prosperity?—Put not thy trust in their abundance, but employ them to the good of thy fellow-creatures, and God's glory. Consider thyself entrusted with that which is dangerous in its abuse, and which without gratitude, humility, and benevolence cannot be turned to thine own advantage.

Art thou poor, infirm, afflicted?—Patience and resignation are the virtues more particularly required of thee. David even after he was exalted from a private station to the throne, *thought it good for him that he had been afflicted.* And better, says the wise man, *is it to go into the house of mourning, than to the house of joy, if the living will lay it to heart.*

In every condition, not less happy than religious, is that man, who, sensible of his de-

dependence on God, and confident in the divine goodness and justice, can say with Job, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!*

After all our reasonings, it will, nevertheless be found that the mind of man, must still look beyond the present hour; we are made for futurity, we cannot, we ought not to forget our interest in it.

The aim of this discourse has been only to divert you from engaging too much of your attention to the transitory concerns of this short, and precarious state of existence.

Let us, therefore, but transfer our hope of something still to be enjoyed away from this world, to that happiness, which God hath prepared for them that love him in Christ Jesus. Let us shew forth our love by obedience to his commands, then may our desires, our expectation, and our confidence have an unbounded scope for activity in the pursuit.

The good we then shall have in view,
will

will subject us to no disappointments, unmixed in its nature, certain in its effect, and in its duration, lasting as eternity.—That we may all finally partake of it, God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ.

SERMON IV.

FIRST EPISTLE *to the* CORINTHIANS,

Chapter xv. Verses 17, 18, 19, 20.

*If Christ be not raised, your Faith is vain ;
ye are yet in your sins. Then they also
which are fallen asleep in Christ are pe-
rished. If in this life only we have hope
in Christ, we are of all men most mise-
rable. But now is Christ risen from the
dead, and become the first fruits of them
that slept.*

ST. PAUL throughout the chapter of
which these words of my text are part,
treats expressly of the General Resurrec-
tion

tion of the Dead ; and what he delivers on this article of Faith, merits our most serious attention, whether we consider the importance of the subject itself, or the force of his arguments concerning it.

The principal evidence on which he maintains that the Dead shall rise again, is the actual instance of Christ's Resurrection ; on the truth of this single fact, he rests indeed the whole system of Christianity. *' If Christ, says he, be not raised, your Faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins, and they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

That the Messiah, in the execution of the gracious purposes for which he was to appear in the world, should suffer an ignominious death, had been plainly foretold by the Prophets. Thus therefore it behoved Christ to suffer, ere he assumed the character of our Redeemer ; nor could there have been such ample ground of assurance as there is, that he had obtained for us the victory over Sin and Death,
had

had he himself been swallowed up in the grave, and his spirit left to rest as under the common lot of mortality. To his Resurrection our Saviour had appealed before his death for the fullest testimony of his divine character, and had he not actually risen again, the conclusion could have been no other, than that he had imposed upon his followers, and that such as had died in the confidence of his intercession, had perished under a vain expectation.

St. Paul not only admits this reasoning to be just, but adds likewise, that his own conduct, and the conduct of the Apostles in attesting the truth of Christ's resurrection, was absurd on any other supposition, than the certainty, that Christ had actually risen, and the firm persuasion that they in like manner should rise again from the dead.—*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

In this mode of reasoning the Apostle neither appears to proceed on doubtful evidence,

evidence, nor to be hurried away by the zeal of enthusiasm. He reasons coolly, and methodically ; “ We who make profession of Christianity are subject on that account to contempt, and reproach, to persecution, imprisonment, and death ; considering then our situation with respect to this life only, it is evident we can gain no advantage by our conduct ; on the contrary, we expose ourselves wilfully to all the evils which are inflicted upon us, and are confessedly more miserable than other men. It must therefore be acknowledged that having no interest in imposing an untruth upon you, we ourselves at least must be persuaded of the fact we attest, and trust to another state of existence for the recompence of our present self-denial and perseverance.”

In answer to this it may be said,—the argument does indeed prove, that the Apostle, and his associates were fully satisfied with the evidence, but they might still

still believe upon evidence insufficient to establish the faith of others who have more discernment, and less credulity.

The point then to be farther considered is, whether the witnesses of so extraordinary a fact were not deceived.

Were they hurried away by an affectionate attachment to their master, or led into the mistake by that natural disposition we all have, of readily admitting what we wish to be true?—Such instances are not uncommon in the history of the human mind.

But impressions of a direct opposite tendency appear to have prejudiced the Apostles ; no sooner was Christ led away to judgment than his followers at once forsook him, and fled. They all forsook him, though they were conscious of his innocence, and had seen the most striking instances of his power, and authority. Peter indeed had the courage, perhaps rather the curiosity only, to attend the event of his trial ; but he who had so lately

lately acknowledged him to be the Son of the living God, and had zealously professed his resolution rather to die with him, than to deny him; he who in the first transport of his passion had drawn the sword in his defence, no sooner saw him led away to the judge, than he denies, with an oath, having ever had the least connection, or acquaintance with him.

We do indeed read that the Disciples so far recovered from their consternation, as again to assemble themselves together soon after their Master's death, the meeting being held privately and the doors shut, for fear of the Jews. The apprehension for their personal security was too well founded, they knew, that suspicions had been entertained of their having a design to steal away the dead body; had they been discovered together, they might probably have fallen a sacrifice to the popular fury, which the Chief Priests and Pharisees had excited against them.—At this meeting

meeting the first intelligence was brought to them of Christ being risen from the dead, by some women who had visited his sepulchre with so little expectation of finding him alive, that they had carried spices with them to embalm his body.

Nor were the Disciples more sanguine, or credulous; *the words of the women seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.* So that notwithstanding Christ had foretold to them he would rise again on the third day, and the morning of that day was come, only two of the company had courage, affection, or curiosity enough to go to the sepulchre for farther information.

Even the repeated evidence which was presented to them, did not meet with an easy reception; the same day at evening, when the doors were still shut for fear of the Jews, our Saviour himself appeared in the midst, and although they must have been prepared for this circumstance by what had before been related to them, so far were they from credulity, or from

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yielding an easy assent to the report of his resurrection, that they were terrified, supposing they saw only his spirit, nor would they be convinced to the contrary, until Jesus kindly condescended to submit to the fullest proof which their senses could require, or admit. He called for meat and did eat before them, he invited them to touch his body, and be satisfied that it was real Flesh and Bone.

St. Thomas happened to be absent from this meeting, and though the circumstances of evidence were related to him, so little satisfied was he with the testimony of his brethren, that he still declared the mere sight, and touch of his Master could not convince him, he must *put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side*. Christ invited him to do so, and nothing could more forcibly express the Apostle's conviction than his immediate exclamation, *My Lord! and my God!**

Whoever candidly attends to this rela-

* St. John, ch. xx. ver. 28.

tion cannot surely suspect the Disciples to have been either prejudiced by affection, or hurried away by credulity, to hazard their lives in attesting to others a fact, which, it appears, they themselves had been so very slow of heart to believe.

Nor was there any thing in the manners, and characters of the Apostles which can afford the least pretence to treat them as visionary enthusiasts. The history of their acts, and their writings also are in our hands, which exhibit a convincing proof of their simplicity, veracity, and disinterestedness.

It is indeed true, that on a sudden a very surprising change took place in their conduct. Their fears were wholly forgotten, and regardless of threats, and imprisonment, they not only bore witness to the Resurrection of their Master, but boldly charged the Chief Priests, and Elders with having crucified the Messiah. To what could such a daring assertion be imputed but to a clear and positive conviction,

that Christ was really risen from the Dead ?

The foundation therefore of our Faith standeth sure as the force of testimony can make it. It is confirmed too both by nature, and reason, that the Dead shall rise again.

For to what end was the desire of Immortality implanted in the human breast, and why are we formed to entertain a constant hope of future happiness, if neither be attainable ?

When we contemplate the wonderful display of design in the creation, and disposition of the universe, and see how admirably adapted it is to the use, and convenience of man, can we reasonably suppose that He for whom all these things were made, was intended for no farther purpose of divine wisdom and goodness, than after this short, imperfect, and frail existence, to sink into annihilation ?

What means that fearful anxiety, which so distracts the Sinner at the approach of
Death ?

Death? Whence that smile of peace and security on the countenance of the Just, if after this life there be no resurrection from the dead?

Admitting however that the prospect into a future life was indistinctly seen under a state of nature, it is now brought fully to light by the Gospel.

Since therefore Christ is risen from the Dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept, we in like manner shall surely rise again, and every man must then receive the reward of his conduct, be it good or evil. Judge ye for yourselves, Brethren, what manner of persons ye ought to be. It were better for the impenitent sinner that all should end in the grave, than for him to rise to judgment, who has nothing to hope for, and every thing to fear.—Whosoever therefore looks for peace, and comfort from the knowledge of this great truth, should according to the exhortation of St. Paul purify himself, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of

the Father, even so he also should walk in newness of life.

Awake then thou that sleepest, from thy spiritual slumber, arise from dead works. Vain is the imagination, that because Christ died to save sinners, and rose again for their justification, all such as merely admit the fact, will consequently be saved, or those justified who wilfully persist in their wickedness. The sufferings of Christ will in no wise avail those who are *not made conformable to his death* by dying unto sin, and mortifying their evil lusts; neither can any man reasonably expect to partake of the benefits, and glory of our Lord's Resurrection, who is not *planted in the likeness thereof* by the reformation of his life.

Faith then in the merits, and intercession of Jesus Christ is the right principle of action, but holiness must be the end we aim at. Let the belief of a future state be firmly rooted in your hearts, but not suffered to lie there a barren speculative truth; meditate upon it, and cherish it,

it, till it acquires a predominant influence over every thought, word, and action; there is no good affection which it may not assist and strengthen, no evil inclination which, under the blessing of God's grace, it may not effectually repress.

It is also the surest support a man can have in difficulty, and distress. It teacheth the best lesson of wisdom as well as duty, namely, that of patient submission to the will of God, under the firm persuasion, that he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and deal impartial justice to all mankind.

The hurry of business in some men, and the dissipation of pleasure in others, are but too apt to turn aside the mind from the more distant prospect of a future state; it is the duty therefore of the Preacher to remind you, that these things will shortly pass away like a dream; a new scene will then open itself, subject neither to change nor limitation. How

soon we may enter upon it no man knoweth ; millions have passed at the first step from the Cradle to the Grave. Neither Riches, Strength, nor Youth itself can secure to their possessors a single day. Nay the present hour may be our last, and the account of our deserts be closed before night until the day of final retribution.

Let it therefore be your frequent, your daily practice, to examine into your hopes, and fears on the subject of a future state ; can ye meditate on that solemn theme without the stings of a wounded conscience ? Happy are ye ! and the habit of entertaining such reflections is to you best recommended by the satisfaction you must derive from them ; if on the contrary nothing presents itself to the mind but the fearful expectation of wrath, seek not peace as Felix did by putting off the consideration till a more convenient season, but turn instantly from the evil of your way, no season can ever be found more convenient,

convenient, certainly none so proper as the present.

God grant you the will to accept the means of salvation through Jesus Christ, and to bring them to good effect by the assistance of his Holy Spirit; to whom with the Father and the Son be all honour, and glory, now, and for ever.

SERMON V.

ST. MATTHEW,

Chapter v. Verse 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

THE Jewish Religion before the coming of our Saviour, was much corrupted from its original purity. The nation was divided into sects and parties, eager in their disputes about the forms and ceremonies of worship, while they neglected the practice of holiness—attached to the shadow of religion they forgot the substance of it.

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The chief division was that of the Sadducees and Pharisees ; the first seem to have derived their opinions from the philosophy prevalent in the Gentile world. They denied the Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Being of Spirit or Angel ; it does not indeed appear, that they professed to disbelieve the existence of a God, but if they worshipped him at all, it could be with the expectation of no other recompence, than temporal blessings. Their opinions, however, so little suited to the natural affections of Hope and Fear, which alternately prevail in the human mind, were not generally admitted ; nor was either their reputation or their authority equal to that of the Pharisees, who by an affected sanctity of life, and a scrupulous observance of the ceremonial law, had acquired the highest character for piety, and were held in much veneration by the people ; these fair appearances imposed upon the ignorance and credulity of the multitude ; it is, never-

nevertheless, evident from several circumstances of their conduct, and from the express charge of our Saviour, that inwardly they were worldly, false and vain, and therefore aptly compared by our Lord to sepulchres, adorned and beautiful without, but within full of rottenness and bones.

Christianity had a direct tendency to expose the erroneous doctrines of one sect, and the vain pretensions of the other. The main purpose of Christ's ministry was to bring life and immortality to light, but as the most convincing argument depended upon his own resurrection from the dead, it was not probable that the Sadducees would be at the trouble to contradict him or contend with him; conceited as they were of their own wisdom, and but little interested (as they imagined) in what he taught, it was natural for them to despise, or disregard both him and his doctrine.

On the other hand, as our Saviour addressed himself to the multitude, and plainly

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ly taught that true religion did not consist merely in formal attention to the ceremonials of the law ; that an ostentation of fasting and prayer, although it exhibited the sign of holiness, was yet far removed from the essence of it, that it was in vain to wash their cups and vessels, unless their hands were innocent and their hearts were pure. The application was too obvious for the Pharisees not to see that their character was alluded to, and their importance in danger, since it was on those very observances they had founded their credit and authority.

Through fear, however, of the multitude, who regarded Jesus as a prophet, they were restrained from laying violent hands upon him ; to counteract this impression, then, and to degrade his character in the estimation of the people, they represented him as a profane companion of Publicans and Sinners, a Breaker of the Sabbath, and a setter-forth of New Doctrines.

Our blessed Lord was well aware of the
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prejudices which might be conceived against him from this misrepresentation; he, therefore, obviates the charge by forewarning his disciples not to think, that he was come *to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them.* *Till heaven and earth pass, said he, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

The occasion and intent of our Saviour's declaration in my text, being thus explained, the farther object of this discourse is to point out to you in what manner Christ fulfilled the Law, and the Prophets.

By the Law and the Prophets is plainly understood that rule of life delivered from God to the Jews by the Mosaical dispensation, and which from time to time was confirmed and enforced by succeeding revelations. It consisted of two parts, the ceremonial ordinances, which derived their obligation from the positive command of God, and the moral institutes, which together with the express authority of the divine will, had the sanction of conscience,
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and corresponded with those distinctions of right and wrong, which are natural to the human mind.

God had been pleased in the early age of the world, to select the descendants of the righteous Abraham from among the nations of the earth, in order to keep up the knowledge of himself among men, and to perpetuate the promise and hope of a Redeemer, until the time of its accomplishment should arrive. Whoever, keeping this design in view, attends to the nature and scope of those ordinances, which were blended with the civil polity of the Jews, will easily discern the relation which that singular institution had to the coming and office of the Messiah.

A distinction was ordered to be preserved, not among the several tribes only, but among the particular families of each tribe, until *the Hope of Israel* should appear, and his descent be ascertained from the tribe of Juda, in the house and lineage of David; when the end, therefore, of
this,

this, and such like ordinances was attained, the means became no further necessary and of course were to cease.

The same conclusion extends also to the Jewish sacrifices, which St. Paul observes to have had only *a shadow of the good things to come*, meaning the Death of Christ; *It was not possible*, says the Apostle, *that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins, nor could those sacrifices which were offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.**

There was, then, no intrinsic efficacy in the burnt offerings themselves; they served, indeed, to teach the Jews that they stood in need of some atonement and mediation, they led them to the knowledge of the Messiah's character, and directed their hopes to the mercy of God, through the sacrifice of Christ's blood; he by offering himself once for all to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, made the figures alluding to his death, of no farther use and necessity.

* Ep. to Heb. ch. x. ver. 1. 4.

From the time, therefore, that the Law and Prophets were thus fulfilled by the coming and death of Christ, God appears to have withdrawn that particular regard by which he had so long distinguished the Jewish nation ; their laws, their government, and religion submitted to the will of their conquerors ; their magnificent temple was destroyed, their country taken from them, and a miserable remnant was dispersed over the whole earth, carrying every where with them to this day the proof of their own obstinacy, and bearing an unwilling evidence to the truth of Christianity.

These calamities which befel the nation, rendered the observation of great part of the ceremonial law no longer practicable ; its obligation had ceased before, on its purposes being completed.

But the Mosaical dispensation was not only a system of ceremonial institution ; it contained also the choicest precepts of morality, enforcing, under the authority of God's express command, the practice
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of what our reason must at once admit and approve, as conducive to the general happiness of mankind.

Notwithstanding the many discoveries, and improvements which had been made in the other branches of knowledge, the heathen systems of morality were very partial and defective, and although the Gentiles *did by nature certain things contained in the law*, and were able by their own sense of good and evil, to become in some respects, *a law unto themselves*; yet the commandments delivered from Mount Sinai to the Israelties, display an excellence so superior to what the Gentile world had been able to discover, that from their internal evidence alone, we might reasonably conclude they were written by the finger of God.

It is, nevertheless, plain that the Moral Law, was not delivered in its fullest extent to the Jews before the coming of Christ; it comprehended indeed in general terms the outlines of the duty which arises from the relation we bear to God, and each

other ; but in a manner correspondent to the divine intention of leading to a farther revelation, which Moses himself had declared should in due time be made known ; *The Lord said to me, I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and will put my words into his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him, and it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*

St. Paul, therefore, justly observes, that Christ obtained *a more excellent ministry by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises.**

The change which was to take place in the divine œconomy by Christ's ministry, was manifested at his transfiguration on the mount ; no sooner had the scene of glory closed with the voice from heaven com-

* Ep. to Heb. ch. viii. ver. 6.

manding his disciples to hear him, than they lifted up their eyes, and saw Jesus alone ;—Moses and Elias had disappeared, the Law and the Prophets gave way to the Gospel.

Having explained to you the manner in which Christ fulfilled the Ceremonial Law, I proceed to shew that he completed also, and brought to perfection the Moral Law.

Whosoever will candidly attend to the several precepts and doctrines delivered in the course of Christ's ministry, and recorded in the New Testament, will find rules of life adapted to all the various circumstances of our condition, as dependent and social beings.

The Gospel inculcates a spirit of purity, of meekness, and benevolence, unlike every thing which had before entered the mind of man ; the moral and social virtues are there set in a fuller light, than they had ever been seen in before, and carried to a higher degree of perfection than they had

been by the best institutes of Heathen philosophy, or even in the dispensation delivered by Moses.

It was the declared object of the Mosaical dispensation to restrain the propensity of the Jewish Nation to idolatry; it forbade all acts of Violence and Injustice; it prescribed rules for the External Worship of God, and regulated the visible intercourse of men with each other; But Christianity stopped not there; it directed its influence to the heart; it required its disciples to worship the same God, not with formal rites and ceremonies only, but *in spirit and in truth*: It forbade not merely the Commission of a crime, but the Secret Intention, and commanded men to abstain even from the Appearance of Evil.

In contradiction to all the vain ideas of pride and ambition, and in opposition to the bent of the Jewish Nation, our Saviour bids his disciples learn of him to be meek and lowly, and mean as this self-denying principle may still be thought by the worldly minded,

ed, yet nothing is more certain, than that *Pride was not made for Man*; Humility, Meekness, and Resignation, properly belong to our condition as Weak, Dependent, and Sinful Beings, and whatever claim a haughty and assuming conduct may have to the pre-eminence of this world, *yet blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of Heaven.*

With respect to Benevolence, the utmost stretch of it had gone no farther, than to comprehend kindred, friend, and country; mankind without this circle were Aliens at least, if not Enemies, and agreeably to this limitation, it had been said, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour and hate thine Enemy*; But Christ says, *Love your Enemies—Bless them that curse you—Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use and persecute you.** Such is the nature of that charity which teacheth us to look on all men as brethren, and which our

* St. Mat. ch. v. ver. 43. 44.

Lord was pleased so to prefer before the other social virtues as to make it the peculiar distinction of his disciples. It is the most beneficial affection of the human mind, as well as the most pleasing; it closes the breach of civil distinction; it alleviates the sufferings of pain and sickness; it supplies the wants of the needy, and administers comfort to the afflicted spirit; In a word—it links the happy and the unhappy together, recommending them to each other by acts of kindness, and returns of gratitude.

Christianity, therefore, may justly be considered as the perfection of the Moral Law; but this is not all its excellence; we are indebted to it for the most sublime idea of the Supreme Being—for the certainty of a future state—for the assurances of divine mercy in remitting our sins upon repentance and faith—for the gifts of grace here, and for the promise of an eternal recompence for our sincere endeavours hereafter. Hence arises the richest source of
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consolation, peace, and confidence ; hence the noblest incentives, the best encouragement, and the surest support of persevering virtue.

Let me, therefore, recommend to your serious consideration the following reflection—That since all the knowledge derived to man, from the light of nature, and former revelations, were but introductory to that discovery of God's will by Jesus Christ, we are not to expect any other extraordinary communication of God's wisdom, for the reformation of the world.

The Law and the Prophets are fulfilled, Life and Immortality are clearly brought to light by the Gospel, and our duty is distinctly marked out to us.

If, therefore, we wish for, or fear a future state, we ought carefully to attend to what is required on our part towards the attainment of everlasting salvation. *He that rejecteth me, (saith our Lord) and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him ;*

*him ; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day.**

God grant, therefore, that we may all cheerfully embrace, and henceforth ever hold fast the blessed hope, which he hath given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.

* St. John, ch. xii, ver. 48.

SER.

SERMON VI.

ST. JOHN,

Chapter xx. Verse 31.

These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

THE completion of the prophecies contained in the scriptures of the Old Testament by the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a convincing proof that he was the extraordinary person foretold by the prophets, and expected
by

by the Jewish Nation under the name of the Messiah.

His character was farther declared and confirmed by the manifestation of supernatural authority in the operation of miracles.

The doctrine, also, which he delivered, consonant altogether in its principles to the perfection of the divine attributes, and adapted to the imperfection of human nature, affords a collateral evidence that the dispensation of Christianity, is of God's appointment.

Forcible as either argument is when taken: separate, yet like the parts of a well compacted structure they derive additional strength from their connection with each other.

It has pleased God that the sacred prophecies should be still preserved to us; the history too of the facts relating to their accomplishment, was written under the divine influence, for the instruction of after ages, by men chosen to be eye-wit-

witnesses of the truth, whose record has been uninterruptedly transmitted down from their time to our own.

The gracious design of God's providence herein is obvious, that we who could not be of the number of such as believed, because they saw, might still partake of the blessing extended by promise to those who have not seen, and yet have believed, *That we also might have life through his name.*

It is a common phrase of scripture to express whatever is most excellent and desirable to us by the term *Life*; but a state of eternal happiness in the world to come, as it is the consummation of all the blessings of the Gospel, so it seems to be unquestionably what is intended in the text, as will appear also by comparing it with other parallel passages in the same Evangelist; *Whosoever believeth in him, saith St. John, shall not perish, but have eternal life*; and, in the same chapter, *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.**

* St. John, ch. iii. ver. 16. 36.

Regeneration from the death of sin, and justification from the sentence of past transgressions are also included in the term *Life*. St. John says, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God,** and St. Paul, speaking of his sanctification, says *The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.†*

In which ever then of these senses the word is taken, it makes no other difference than that in the one, it is considered as the preparation for the happiness proposed to us, in the other as the consummation of it; both are the rewards of faith in Jesus Christ.

But the main stress of the inquiry upon this subject, lies in the following question, What is the nature of that Faith or Belief in Christ *whereby we have life through his name?*

Various are the conceits into which men have been led by the zeal of contro-

* First Ep. of St. John, ch. v. ver. i.

† Ep. to Gal. ch. ii. ver. 20.

versy,

verſy, and ſuch has been, and I fear is the extravagance of fanaticiſm as to oppoſe faith to morality, and to ſet at variance with each other, what ought ever to be as inſeparably as they are naturally allied, differing only as cauſe and effect.

Whoever will be at the trouble to compare the ſeveral paſſages of ſcripture where faith is ſpoken of, and adopt the plain and obvious ſenſe of them, conſidered together as forming a complete ſyſtem of religious duty, cannot be at a loſs to diſcover, that the Faith required of a Chriſtian, is ſuch a firm perſuaſion and acknowledgement of Chriſt's divine authority, as implies the obligation of unreſerved obedience to his commands, and a full confidence, that through his mediation the gracious promiſes of God to mankind will finally be accompliſhed.

I ſhall endeavour to confirm this idea by recommending to your attention in the firſt place, what is ſaid on the nature and excellence of Abraham's faith.

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St. Paul calls him *the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised,** and it is enjoined by the Apostle, that we should walk in the steps of his faith, to the end, that as it was counted to him for righteousness, so righteousness might be imputed to us also.

Abraham's faith, therefore, being set forth as a pattern for us to follow, it is necessary that we attend to the character of it, for which it is proposed to our imitation.

God having been pleased to assure the patriarch, *that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, he, fully persuaded that what God promised he was able also to perform, staggered not, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*

He regarded not the improbability of the means whereby the counsels of the Almighty should be effected, nor with the vain importance of philosophic doubt, in-

* Ep. to Rom. ch. iv. ver. 11.

quired *How can these things be?* but reasoning with himself on the truth and power of God, *He against hope believed in hope*, relying altogether on the word of the Almighty, for the execution of his promise.

Under this persuasion also the patriarch stood firm in the severe trial which God was pleased to make of his faith, by requiring him to sacrifice his son, the sole heir of the promised blessing. He hesitated not to obey, *accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.*

Hence it clearly appears that Abraham's justification arose not merely from faith as the acquiescence of his understanding in the nature of God's attributes, but also from his ready obedience to God's will. His faith was the principle or root, his works were the effects or fruits of it, the perfection of both, depended on their union with each other.

But when the fulness of time was come that the promise should be executed, and

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the Saviour of the world enter on the ministry of his office, a new proposition presented itself to the understanding as the test of faith. It became for a while the main article of controversy whether Jesus was truly the Messiah or no ; the assent to this question was what distinguished the believer from the unbeliever ; thus when many had taken offence at Christ's doctrine and forsaken him, Peter's profession, *We believe and are sure that thou art Christ the Son of the Living God*, was received as a full and sufficient testimony that the twelve continued firm in their confidence.

Agreeable to this profession was Martha's answer, *I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of God which should come into the world*.

Notwithstanding, therefore, a general, and unlimited confidence in the attributes of God had been in the earlier ages of the world, the test whereby those *had obtained a good report*, who looked for though they *did not receive the promise*, yet is it plain, that

that as soon as the Gospel was preached, and the proper evidences exhibited to the world, an acknowledgement of Christ's divine character was a condition indispensably necessary to the becoming his disciple.

It cannot, however, surely be supposed to follow, that nothing more was understood by such an acknowledgement, than the bare assent of the mind to the truth of the simple proposition. Faith in Jesus Christ, to have its justifying or saving quality, must then have included, and ever does imply a hearty submission to his authority—an unfeigned disposition to receive his doctrine, and obey his ordinances.

○ Multitudes there doubtless were who from the display of his miraculous power, entertained a strong persuasion of his mission from God, and made profession to be his disciples; all such persons were certainly in some sense of the number of those who believed, yet according to our Saviour's own declaration, their faith was of no avail so long as it was unaccompanied

by the works which his authority prescribed ; Can any thing be more express than his language in that respect? *Not every one that saith to me Lord ! Lord ! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.**

Although the mind, therefore, may not be influenced by fear or false shame, to suppress an acknowledgement of the truth, yet so long as the compliance of the will is withheld from the conviction of the understanding, we may conclude, the heart is not right before God, and the believer has no part in the promise of life.

Whatever then may be the degree of persuasion, unless suitable works accompany it, it is no more the true Christian Faith, than the body without the spirit is a perfect man.

Thus far the inference is plain, that if we acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God, we must acknowledge him also to be our Lord and Master, we

* St. Matt. ch. vii. ver. 21.

must

must become obedient, and faithful subjects of his kingdom, ere we can entertain any reasonable expectation to share the benefits of his protection.

It may still be asked, Is then the confessing Jesus to be the Messiah, and living suitably to his precepts all that is required of us to the attainment of eternal happiness?

The answer to this important question depends on the farther measure of knowledge which we have or may derive from the holy Scriptures, concerning the person or office of Jesus Christ.

Whosoever is persuaded of the truth of his divine Mission, is bound to believe whatever shall be revealed by him, or the Spirit of Truth proceeding from him, through the ministry of the Apostles, whom he especially appointed, to receive the truth from him, and shew it unto us. He had declared to them before his death, he had many things to say unto them, which at that time they could not bear, and which were re-

served until the coming of the Holy Ghost, who was to guide them into all truth after his departure into Heaven. *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all Truth.** It is plain therefore, that the whole light of the Gospel was not communicated at once even to the Apostles themselves, but like *the path of the Just by degrees shone forth more and more unto the perfect day.*

The Doctrine of Christ's ignominious Death, and glorious Resurrection, could not so easily have been understood or admitted before as after the facts; how little qualified the Disciples were to receive even the relation of these things, may be seen from the conduct of St. Peter, when, in consequence of the Apostle's zealous profession of his Faith, our Saviour began to shew his disciples what should soon befall him, *he, savouring still the things of men rather than of God,* grew impatient at the

* St. John, ch. xvi. ver. 12. 13.

mention of his Master's sufferings; and moreover, ere he was led to the Cross, denied having had connection with or knowledge of him.

Yet after our Lord's ascension we find not only the fact but the cause also of his death considered as so essential an article of Faith, that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, supposes them to have believed in vain, unless they kept in memory what he had delivered to them, *that Christ died for our sins.**

The circumstance also of our Saviour's resurrection was so strongly insisted upon, that to the former requisition *of confessing with the mouth the Lord Jesus*, St. Paul adds it, as an express condition, *and shall believe in thy heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.†*

Our Lord in his conversation with the Apostles, had occasionally alluded to the especial purpose for which he was to suffer

* First Ep. to Cor. ch. xv. ver. 2. 3.

† Ep. to Rom. ch. x. ver. 9.

death: he had told them, *he was the living bread, of which if any man eat, he should live for ever*; and had added, with a forcible affirmation, *verily, verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you: who so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.**

Yet these sayings of Christ, how expressive soever they may now appear of the sacrifice of his body and blood, which was voluntarily to be offered up for the remission of sins, were not at the time they were spoken so easily understood; many even of his disciples, when they heard it, said, *this is a hard saying, who can bear it?*

But when the Holy Ghost had descended upon the Apostles, and enlightened them, they saw through the figurative expression, and plainly taught, that God had set forth his Son *to be a propitiation through faith in*

* St. John, ch. vi. ver. 51. 53. 54. 55.

*his blood—that we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace.**

Agreeably to the doctrine of St. Paul, St. Peter says, *we are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, and without spot.†* Nor less express is the language of St. John: *the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin.‡*

From what I have submitted to your recollection of the Scriptures, concerning the nature of that Faith which is set forth as the condition of everlasting life, I trust to have made it appear, that it consists not merely in believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, sent by him into the world to instruct and enlighten the understanding, but that it includes repentance, and obedience to his commands, together with an assured but humble confidence,

* Ep. to Rom. ch. iii. ver. 25. Ep. to Ephe. ch. i. ver. 7.

† First Ep. of St. Peter, ch. i. ver. 18. 19.

‡ First Ep. of St. John, ch. i. ver. 7.

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that by the merits and satisfaction of his death, he hath reconciled God to man; and purchased, for all those who sincerely endeavour to fulfil the precepts of his doctrine, eternal life.

Our faith therefore comprehends not only (as that of Abraham's did) a distant prospect of divine mercy; but we believe that the knowledge of salvation is actually given, and that our sins are conditionally remitted by the death of Christ.

God has then dealt with us according to the riches of his mercy. *His Grace, which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared to all men, that denying ungodliness, and wordly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

SERMON VII.

ST. JOHN,

Chapter iii. Verse 2.

*We know that thou art a Teacher come from
God; for no man can do these Miracles that
thou doest, except God be with him.*

THE several parts of the creation, operating upon each other, and producing certain uniform effects, conspire to preserve that order in the visible world, which we usually denominate the Course of Nature.

Imperfect as our knowledge is of the powers and qualities of things, we nevertheless discern any variation from that
course

course which is conformable to our experience; and by the term Miracle is understood any action or event, which could not be supposed to have happened without the interposition of some supernatural agent.

No man, who admits the existence of God, and that the world was made by him, can doubt the extent of his authority, or prescribe bounds to his exercise of it, over the works of his own hands.

It is nevertheless still made a question, whether or no we have sufficient reason to believe that God ever did exert his power in such a manner as to contradict the general tenor of past and present experience.

The advocates of Christianity urge in argument for its truth, that Jesus Christ did make such a display of miracles, as ought still to be admitted in evidence among the other proofs of his divine mission.

Objections have been made to this conclusion, the principal of which I shall speak to, according to the order of time in which they have occurred.

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The first opposers were eye-witnesses of the facts, men of the highest rank and consideration among the Jews ; but, convinced as they were, that God had signally interposed in the execution of the gracious purpose for which he had selected their fathers, they neither questioned the possibility of a miracle, nor the reality of those performed by Christ, but sought only to justify their unbelief by imputing them to the operation of an evil spirit.

Our Saviour himself effectually refuted this malicious charge, by simply appealing to the nature of his doctrine. It was as absurd to suppose that Satan would counteract his own influence, as that God should become the accomplice of falsehood ; if, therefore, what Christ taught tends by its purity and conformity to the law of nature, to promote the glory of God ; if the truths which he communicated respecting a future state, and the terms of our acceptance with the Deity, have an evident relation to the constitution, and ultimate happiness of
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our being, the obvious inference is, that an evil spirit could not be instrumental in furthering the reception of his Doctrines.

The nature then of the Gospel, shews the source from whence the miraculous power, which supports it, is derived ; and the reality of our Saviour's miracles being admitted (as it was by the Jews), the conclusion necessarily followed, that he acted under the commission, and by the power of God.

An objection of more modern times was, that, the laws of nature being immutable and eternal, miracles were impossible ; but as this principle could be adopted only by those who professed atheism, or supposed matter itself to be God, it was very partially received at first, and soon came to nothing of itself.

A far more subtle opposition to the reception of Christianity was reserved for the days we live in. The power of God to work miracles is no longer disputed ; but we are told, that the authority of general
expe-

experience so far preponderates against the assertions of whatever testimony may be produced in support of a miracle, that we cannot have such assurance respecting it as ought in reason to engage our belief. According to the same principle, had we even been eye-witnesses of the facts recorded in the Old and New Testaments, we ought to have mistrusted the judgment of our senses—Much more, it is said, ought we to reject the relation of History, transmitted to us through so long a lapse of time.

The fallacy of this argument is artfully concealed by the confusion it introduces into the nature of the several evidences, whereby different kinds of truths are distinguished, and ascertained.

General experience (which is indeed a proper test for our admission of probable propositions) is substituted as the only standard for measuring the truth of matters of fact, which are ascertainable by the evidence of sense, or the testimony of those who themselves relate the evidence of their senses,

senses, on which grounds indeed general experience must itself also ultimately depend.

Reference to a familiar instance or two, will illustrate the distinction that is necessary to be made.

Not one man in a million may have been guilty of killing his father, but should a criminal be charged with parricide, would his judges calculate the chances of probability, whether such a crime were committed or not? or would they proceed to examine the evidence of the fact?—It is more than half a century since the plague has been known in Europe; but can we doubt the accounts of its having ever raged there, because it has happened so rarely? or shall we refuse credit to the existence of a monster, merely because it differs from the generality of creatures born of the same stock?

Yet such is the mode of reasoning which asserts, that a circumstance contrary to common experience ought to be believed only in proportion of one or more facts against
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the accumulated weight of numberless opposite facts which have happened before or since.

It certainly is reasonable to doubt the attestation of a miracle, until we shall have made a scrupulous inquiry into the evidence by which it is attested; but the mere infrequency, or improbability of the fact, ought not to preclude all inquiry, nor to be received as decisive against the authority of sense, or testimony, when supported by such circumstances as are requisite to establish its credibility.

What those circumstances are, is the next point to be attended to. A miracle, to be entitled to our belief, must be directed to some particular end, the importance of which justifies the supposition, that it is worthy the interference of divine Power. Secondly, it must not only unequivocally affect the known laws of nature, but its application to the purpose must be obvious and direct. Thirdly, where we cannot have the means of conviction from our senses, but are to rely on the testimony of

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others,

others, the competency, the views, in a word, the whole character of the attestors must be carefully inquired into.

Let the miracles of Christ be tried by these principles, and we shall find in them every mark of veracity.—To what more important end could the divine power be visibly and immediately interposed, than in the declaration of infinite goodness and unmerited mercy to mankind? The object of our Saviour's life and death, was to restore the Sons of Adam to a lost inheritance of eternal glory, an object surely worthy of its divine agent; and the display of Almighty power, when considered relatively to such a design, and as making part of the system, loses its natural improbability, and is no longer to be measured by the criterion of ordinary occurrences.

A miracle, in the second place, must not only unequivocally affect the known laws of nature, but its application to the purpose, for which it is performed, must be obvious and direct.

An unusual appearance in the motion
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or form of the heavenly bodies, may be inexplicable on principles which are generally known, yet we still conceive that some natural cause for it may, and does exist : the unlearned may be terrified, but the philosopher seeks for a solution.—The miracles of our Saviour were not of such a description ; there was no time for the mind to doubt the relation of cause and effect, no necessity to listen to the conjectures of the imagination respecting any concealed agency ; the execution was instantaneous : Christ but bade the Cripple walk, and he sprang from his Couch ;—No sooner was the word uttered, than the Deaf heard, the Dumb spake, and the Blind saw ; the Spectator found at once full satisfaction in the conviction of his senses ; the controul of nature, and the power which controuled it, were alike clear, obvious, and indisputable.

The purpose also for which the miracles were performed, and their application to it, were as plain and direct as the facts them-

selves. *The works that I do* (says our Saviour) *bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.**—A conviction in the minds of his hearers, that he was a Messenger come from God, was the point first to be established, ere he could command their attention to the truths he delivered. However conformable his doctrine might be to Reason, how forcible or insinuating soever his eloquence, yet the circumstances of his birth, the low estate of his family and condition, were so contradictory to the prejudices which the Jews had conceived of their Messiah, that there was not the least probability, either of his character or his precepts being, on their own account, attended to.

Nor indeed could it reasonably be expected, that the Jews, favoured as they had been with a peculiar Revelation of the divine will, should admit a New Doctrine, apparently contradictory to it, on the bare word and affirmation of an unknown teacher; for though Christianity did approve,

* St. John, ch. v. ver. 36.

and

and enforce the moral precepts of the Mo-
saical Law, the whole intent of which it
was its object to fulfil, yet was it appar-
ently contradictory, in superseding the fur-
ther obligation of the ceremonial observ-
ances.

Were the Sons to forego the practice of
their Fathers, sanctified by the immediate
ordinance of Divine authority, on less evi-
dence than that which had established it?
—It was impossible for the Jews to have re-
ceived a justifiable conviction, otherwise
than by an equal display of miraculous
power, that Christ was authorized to abro-
gate the smallest tittle of their law.

The application, therefore, of our Sa-
viour's miracles to the purpose of his mis-
sion, was not only plain and direct, but it
was necessary and indispensable.

The last rule for the assurance of our be-
lief, to which I propose to speak, is, that
where we cannot have the means of con-
viction from our own senses, but must rely
on the testimony of others, the Compe-

tency, the Views, and whole Character of the Attestors, must be carefully investigated.

Living, as we do, so many centuries after the facts have happened which are related in the New Testament, our Faith rests (humanly speaking) on the report of those who were eye-witnesses, and on the confirmation of their testimony by the continued reception it has had in the world through every succeeding age.

Had, then, the Apostles and Evangelists sufficient knowledge of the facts they relate, to be competent judges of their truth or falsity? They were indeed, for the most part, men of a lowly condition; who, being from their youth engaged in laborious occupations, were destitute of those refinements, which result from a learned and more polished education. Had then any nice or subtle distinction of speculative opinions been the matter in question, it is possible they might have been imposed upon by the arts of sophistry, to mistake that for
true,

true, which was not so; but no other qualification was necessary, for the purpose of their conviction in plain matters of fact, than an ordinary understanding, and unimpaired organs of sense, that their eyes should see, and their ears hear.

Had still the display of Christ's divine authority been confined to a single fact, or to a few instances; had the Apostles been the only persons convinced, there might, perhaps, have been room to suppose, that such ignorant Men had been deluded, rather than that the order of Nature was suspended or changed. But the ministry of Christ was a continued scene of wonderful benevolence; he went about through all Judea, giving frequent and various proofs of his supernatural power.

Whole Multitudes were at once the witnesses and the subjects of the miracles he wrought. Thousands had partaken of the loaves and fishes, who saw the remnants still exceed the original stock of provisions. When the widow's Son was restored to

life, it was done openly, and in view of all those who were attending the body to the grave. Many of the Jews were at the house of Martha in Bethany; and present when, at Christ's command, Lazarus, after having been dead four days, arose from the Tomb.

We may therefore justly conclude, that the Disciples were not imposed upon; nor is it less certain, that they had no interest whatever in imposing upon others.

Men educated, and engaged from their youth in habits of laborious industry, are of all others least likely to be influenced by the spirit of ambition; nor, on the other hand, is it probable they should expose themselves to bonds, imprisonments, scourgings, and death, merely to support a falsehood, from which they could expect neither fame nor profit.

It may nevertheless be argued, that, improbable as the supposition may be, yet it is possible for weak or designing men to form the most absurd combinations;—in-
stances

stances of the like folly or fraud are to be found in the history even of later times. But there is a remarkable difference in the cases: in the one, the Sect already prevalent gave birth to the pretended miracles, and the prejudices of fanaticism produced a disposition to admit whatever was thought capable of supporting its pretensions; whereas the Miracles of Jesus gave birth to his Sect, and so averse were the bulk of the nation to the reception of his doctrine, that had not his miracles been true, no confederacy could have obtruded them on the world, or have prevented a detection; considering besides, that all the learning, and all the authority of the state, were engaged in suppressing the belief of them.

It must be granted, after all, that there is a material difference in the nature of the evidence on which the Apostles and first converts received the Gospel, and that on which it is now proposed to us: they believed because they saw; we see not, and have only their testimony to rely upon.

upon. Let it, however, be observed, that there are circumstances since the time when Christianity was first published, which have added fresh proof, and continue still to confirm more and more the truth of it.

The circumstances I mean, are the wonderful progress of the Gospel, and the present state of the Jewish Nation.

Near two thousand years are passed, in which the religion of Christ has withstood the prejudices, the persecutions, and the sophistry that have opposed its establishment, so conclusive in favor of Christianity is the inference which follows from the miraculous progress of the Gospel, that the Enemies of our Faith have thought to triumph over it, could they but account for its success from such causes as are found to influence, and direct the ordinary course of human affairs.

But vain has been, and ever must be the attempt to persuade men,—that thousands of Jews should at once forego their prejudices—

dices—that the Greeks should abandon their philosophy and the superstition of ancient Rome give way to the preaching of a few illiterate men, had not *God been with them*, confirming their evidence by a continued communication of miraculous power, and by the influence of his holy spirit supporting their constancy under persecutions even to Death.

The dreadful calamities too which so soon followed after the imprecation of the Jews, that the blood of Christ might be on themselves, and their Children; their expulsion from their native land, and the present state of that singular people (singular not only in their rites, and customs, but in their ruin,) afford a convincing argument to these later ages in which we live of their obstinacy in rejecting the Gospel, and supply us with additional evidence in support of its truth.

The mighty Kingdoms of the East (in comparison of which the Jews were scarce a people) have long ago been overwhelmed
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in the abyſs of time, and are come to a perpetual end.—The ſucceeding Maſs of Univerſal Empire has crumbled into ruin, and the once Conquerors of the World are blended with the barbarous hordes under which they fell; but the descendants of Abraham are to this day a diſtinct Race, diſperſed through the various Countries of the Earth;—in whatever part of the world the name of Chriſt is heard, there they are to be found, proclaiming the evidence of their own guilt, and exhibiting themſelves a living Miracle, to ſupport the truth of that Religion they ſtill continue to reject.

If therefore the Miracles of Chriſt were directed (as certainly they were) to an end the moſt important, and beneficial to Mankind.—If his voice controuled the courſe of Nature, and the diſplay of his power was ſuch as neceſſarily to announce him a teacher come from God—If although we have not ourſelves been Eye-witneſſes of his Acts, we receive the relation of them
upon

upon a testimony not to be doubted—If the effects of his preaching are not to be accounted for on any other supposition than that of Divine agency—If, lastly, the Fate of the Jewish people (the still zealous guardians as well as original depositaries of those prophecies which foretold the coming and Character of the Messiah) is even now a Miracle before our Eyes!—Away with the Scepticism of a vain and presumptuous Philosophy “ *The preaching of the Gospel was not with enticing words of Man’s Wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of Power: That your Faith should not stand in the Wisdom of Man but in the Power of God.*”

SERMON VIII.

ST. MATTHEW,

Chapter xxvi. Verse 41.

*The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh
is weak.*

FEW Beings appear so unlike to each other as Man does to himself when viewed in different lights ; contemplate him on one hand ; he is eminently superior to all the creatures around him, and confessedly the Lord of the whole earth ; he connects by his art and industry the most distant quarters of this earthly globe, making them subservient to his convenience, and
pleasure ;

pleasure ; he extends his view into the boundless regions of space, and eternity ; he investigates in his way the course, and order of the heavenly bodies, and pursuing the great chain of causes and effects, traces the divine power from the minutest atom to the first great principal of all things, God himself.

Nor is the excellence of Man conspicuous only in the extent of his intellectual faculties : impressed with a sense of good, and evil, he naturally approves the one, and condemns the other ; he is conscious of the relation he stands in to God, and his fellow-creatures, and even while in this state of mortality, seems already exalted above it by his hopes of enjoying a blessed eternity.—Viewed in this light, Man certainly is as the Psalmist expresses it, *little lower than the Angels* in dignity, and perfection.

Contemplate the portrait in another point of view ;—the likeness is still as strong, but not less unfavourable than the former

former is flattering. Behold the Lord of the visible Creation, a slave to his appetites, and passions, yielding to what his conscience disapproves, and acting in direct Opposition to those principles which he cannot but still confess the most fit and proper for regulating his conduct.

He that was before seen to stretch forth his eye to the clouds, to measure the path of the Earth, and to search out the ordinances of Heaven, is at a loss to account for the œconomy of his own existence; he knoweth not the period of his days, nor can add a single instant to their continuance.

Behold him surrounded every where with objects, the most familiar of which has qualities far exceeding his comprehension. He is placed in the midst of danger, in a world, where the bite of an insect, a grain of sand, where indeed there is nothing which may not be towards him the instrument of Death; and should the delicate machine of his bodily constitution

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escape

escape the rude accidents of violence and disease, yet the seeds of decay are set in it from its first formation, grow with it from infancy, and in a few years are sure to effect its dissolution.

The partial contemplation of Man under the first of these descriptions has given birth to the vain idea of human sufficiency. —An idea that the light of nature is adequate to all the purposes of existence has raised a system of presumption, which sets forth, that Man is left altogether to the guidance of his own reason, and in a moral view is independant of his Maker.

The effect of considering Man when placed in the unfavourable light only, has been to depreciate human nature below the standard of its real excellence, and the advocates for this humiliating estimation, maintaining that we are entirely incapable of good, would persuade us, that our natural weakness and imperfection are a full apology for our vices, and our follies, if not a justification of them.

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To one or other of these extravagant conclusions may we refer all the rigid pride, and all the soft indulgence of heathen philosophy, equally pernicious to Mankind, either by stifling the natural affections, or by gratifying them to a dangerous and criminal excess.

But to account for this inconsistency in the character of Man, to form a just estimate of his abilities, and to reconcile the apparent contradictions in his nature, we must have recourse to the holy Scripture, which alone solves the difficulty.

The Sacred History teacheth us that Man is formed *of the Earth Earthy*, but that the Design and end of his Creation was not a temporary, transient existence; He was not only to be subservient to his Creator's will in this world, but to his glory also in a state of endless happiness; for this purpose it was necessary he should be qualified with a rational, and immortal Soul, or in other words, be made capable of discharging his Duty, and enjoying the

bleffing which was to be the reward of his obedience ; God therefore at his firft formation *breathed into him the breath of life and made him after his own image*, fpiritual, and immortal. Thus conftituted according to the Will of God, Man was placed on earth the fcene of his probation, where he might give affurance of a difpofition to obedience, endeavouring at leaft fincerely to pleafe God, and render himfelf a proper object of divine favour.

This defign of Providence neceffarily required that we fhould be at once capable of the fervice expected from us, yet liable to tranfgreffion ; and fuch is found to be the nature of our condition from the cradle to the grave. Our Life is one continued ftruggle between the jarring elements of our conftitution ; while reafon prompts us to purfue Virtue, and Holinefs, our fenfual appetites are ever feducing us to criminal excefs in their gratification ; our will in the mean time is free in the choice, and as either part of our com-
pofition

position is suffered by us to prevail over the other, we improve or debase our nature. If by good habits, under God's grace, virtue and religion happily gain the ascendancy, so that they become familiar, and settled principles of conduct in us, we then co-operate with the design of Providence, and advance towards that state of purity and perfection, to which the soul of Man is admirably adapted, and naturally aspires.

If on the other hand by an undue indulgence, the carnal appetites and the passions are suffered to exceed the bounds prescribed by reason and conscience, if evil habits once come to predominate, our desires after virtue and perfection daily grow weaker, the distinction itself of right and wrong becomes insensibly impaired and lost, until the sinner degrades himself from that pre-eminence wherein he was placed above the beasts that perish.

It is nevertheless well worthy of observation that to what length soever the sen-

ſual part may prevail in practice, it ſcarcely ever does ſo in ſentiment, and affection.

All men conſpire to put a high eſtimation on moral excellence, even the moſt ſenſual are at times diſguſted with the like exceſs in others, and hardly ever fully reconciled to it in themſelves.

Experience therefore teaching us that there are theſe oppoſite principles in our conſtitution, and ſcripture explaining the cauſe why the divine wiſdom has ſo blended them together, the obvious queſtions are—what is our Duty?—what are our abilities to execute it?—and how may we employ them to the beſt advantage?

The firſt—what is our Duty? is eaſily answered; it is clearly ſo, to ſuſtain the nobler part of our compoſition, and to aſpire after the higheſt degree of perfection which is attainable by human nature, nor can there be a doubt that the general means to do ſo, are by giving virtue the preference to vice, both in practice, and affection.

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The heart of Man, since the transgression of our first parent, is indeed a soil productive rather of evil than good, yet there still remain some seeds of primitive innocence.

Want of apprehension, or of education, may render the greater part of Mankind insensible to the refined distinctions of Philosophy, but the fear of God, the excellence of Justice, Truth, and Benevolence are principles of conduct so very obvious to the meanest capacity, that no man can transgress against them, without being at the same time sensible of the transgression; And although we may hear of attempts to apologize for sin on account of natural infirmity, yet no man is so absurd, be he ever so profligate, as to think of justifying his misconduct, on the principle either of reason, or conscience.

So far then the understanding is right, that until evil habits are become inveterate, it both discerns, and approves a right conduct; under this disposition of the

mind it might indeed naturally be supposed that more would be found, than are found, to practise what they know to be their duty. Unhappily for us, probable as the conclusion appears, it is not verified by experience. Men for the most part ever did, and still continue to approve what is right, and yet to follow what is wrong, *the Spirit is ever willing but the Flesh is still weak.*

Is this inconsistency then an incurable infirmity of Human Nature? Has God created Man for sin and destruction, subjecting him unavoidably to error, and imparting knowledge only to let him see that he is sinful, weak, and miserable?—God forbid!—Infidelity may teach such doctrines, but Christianity speaketh better things; it admits indeed the weakness of Man, and his inability to do the will of God, in the full extent of unerring obedience; but it expects not perfection, and therefore exacts Sincerity only in our endeavours after righteousness.

Weak

Weak as our abilities are, yet are we not wholly incapable of Piety, and Virtue; even in the degeneracy, and corruption of the heathen world, some few illustrious Characters were to be found, untainted by the general contagion of vice and superstition, which shining forth as light in a dark place shed a beneficial influence on the social interests of civil Life, and still preserved the memorial that God had made man at first in his own image.

It is certainly therefore in the power of Man in some degree to improve, or debase his nature; he is susceptible of habits, and can by forbearance, or indulgence so far weaken, or confirm his dispositions, as to become in a great measure the Arbiter of his own character.

The path of Virtue is indeed of a steep ascent, and many are the difficulties which obstruct the way, they will nevertheless all yield if we strive against them with fortitude, and perseverance; besides if the heart be right, and the will intent upon the victory

tory the divine Grace will co-operate with our efforts, make strong our weakness, and bring us off in the end *even more than conquerors*.

In what manner then may we best employ the abilities we have ?

The most effectual remedy which we can apply to the uncertain, and irregular motions of the human mind, agitated as it is by various passions, and allured by strong temptations, is *to set God always before us*, to make the attainment of his favour the primary object of our lives, suffering no consideration whatever of worldly advantage to interfere with our Duty.

Consistently with this first rule of Life we shall do well to choose such useful, and laudable objects of pursuit, as belong to the situation we hold in Society, and are proportioned to our means of attainment. Be a man's fortune, or condition what it may, he must have some employment or other if he desire to retain his innocence. The daily occupation, to which the necessities

sities of a low estate subject the labourer, and the mechanic, weighed against the danger to which the rich are frequently exposed from idleness, or the nature of some ruinous amusements, leaves the balance of happiness greatly in favour of honest industry.

Another means, of which we may avail ourselves to great advantage, is by using Prudence, and Caution in avoiding as much as possible every occasion of temptation, and guarding the heart against the first impulses of irregular desire. It is no uncommon thing for the young and inexperienced to be confident in the integrity of their own intentions. They scruple not therefore to comply with the fashions, and follies of the world to a certain point, which they fix to be the boundary of innocence, and beyond which they are determined not to go; the extravagance however, and profligacy, into which so many are unawares, and imperceptibly betrayed by a familiar intercourse with pleasure
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and folly, ought to be a warning against the too great reliance on our very best resolutions. Whenever we cease to *watch*, we are in danger of *falling into temptation*, but if we once presumptuously venture to approach the borders of sin, the path is slippery, one false step will bring on another, and the recovery will be difficult at least, perhaps impracticable.

Notwithstanding therefore a conscious sense of worth and dignity may at times elevate our thoughts, and animate our endeavours towards perfection, yet experience for the most part teacheth, that it is far the safest way to distrust ourselves, and apply for that assistance which alone can afford us security. *God, who resisteth the proud, giveth grace to the humble.* His justice, and his goodness will not suffer any man, who throws himself upon his mercy for protection, to be tempted above what he is able to bear.

But we must never forget for a moment that the measure of divine influence will
depend

depend greatly on ourselves, and an increase of Grace cannot reasonably be expected but in proportion to the sincerity of our endeavours after improvement. It must be the united force both of our own will and God's assistance, which is to determine the conflict between Flesh, and Spirit, and give the latter that pre-eminence which is agreeable to the Reason, Duty, and Happiness of Man.

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SERMON IX.

ST. JOHN,

Chapter xiv. Verse 27.

My Peace I give unto you.

THE declared intent of our Saviour's coming into the world was to restore peace to Mankind ; the Angels at his Birth sang *Glory to God in the highest, on Earth Peace—Good will towards Man*. He was styled by the Prophet the *Prince of Peace* ; And this was the blessing which before his departure he bequeathed to his disciples, “ *My Peace I give unto you.*”

Yet whoever looks into the History of
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mankind, and enquires for the cause of the many evils which have made the world, in the degree it is, a scene of violence, will find much which at first view may appear chargeable to the account of the Christian Religion. Notwithstanding that universal benevolence so strongly recommended by the precepts, and example of our blessed Saviour, the professors of his Gospel have been in almost every age since its first publication engaged in disputes, which have too frequently ended in all the miseries of War, and Persecution.

It must indeed be confessed, that the mild influence of our holy religion, breathing nothing but gentleness, forbearance, and charity, has proved in numberless instances too feeble a restraint against the corrupt passions, and worldly interests of mankind. The uncharitable spirit of contending parties has at times filled the world with Calamities and Crimes that have disgraced the Christian Name, while under the fervor of intemperate zeal every sentiment

ment of humanity has been too often utterly extinguished.

The Disciples themselves to whom the promise of Peace was expressly given, and who were particularly commissioned to preach *the Gospel of Peace*, experienced all the persecution which the malice of their enemies could inflict upon them; so much more applicable to their condition was the former declaration of their Master, that *he came not to send Peace, but a Sword.*

How then (it may reasonably be asked) is the plain sense of the text to be reconciled either with Christ's own words, or with the circumstances which have accompanied the propagation of the Gospel?

The difficulty of this seeming contradiction is at once removed, by attending only to the distinction which our Lord himself made, between the *Peace of God*, and *the Peace of the World.*

In a very early communication with his Disciples when he first called them to him, and commissioned them to preach the Gos-

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pel, he plainly foretold that the world would *hate them*, that they should be put out of the Synagogues, and be delivered up to persecution, *Think not* therefore, says he, *that I am come to send Peace upon earth, I came not to send Peace but a Sword.** Think not, that in the exercise of your ministry, I send you forth to enjoy the comforts of worldly ease and prosperity, but be prepared for contempt, tribulations, sufferings, and Death.

When our blessed Saviour therefore was about to take leave of his Disciples, so far from contradicting what he had said before to them, his last discourse was directed to comfort and support them under the dangers and distresses, to which they were soon to be exposed in their Ministry—*These things, said he, I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace, in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.†*

* St. Matthew, ch. x. ver. 34.

† St. John, ch. xvi. ver. 33.

What

What then is the nature of that Peace which the Disciples were taught to expect, and which every sincere Christian is in like manner encouraged to look for?

With respect to the Disciples, its effect was to confirm their confidence in the assurances he had given them, by the visible influence of the Holy Spirit. A particular interposition of divine power was necessary in their case for the furtherance of the commission which they were appointed to execute; they stood in need of languages, to convey the knowledge of the Gospel to foreign Nations, and of some supernatural qualifications to excite the attention of their hearers, as well as to confirm the truths they delivered.

In this sense of our Saviour's words the gift was special, adapted to the peculiar exigences of the persons, and times of the Apostles;—but in its more enlarged signification all Christians are generally comprehended, and are partakers of that peace, comfort, and satisfaction which are the

fruit of the spirit through belief in Jesus Christ.

The primary object of what God has been pleased to reveal unto us by his Son is the attainment of happiness in a future state ; our attention, and hopes are principally directed to that distant prospect, nor is the perfection of enjoyment to take place till this scene of existence be past.

Yet notwithstanding that the Christian dispensation regards the concerns of this world but in a secondary light, it will nevertheless be found by experience to have an immediate influence on our present condition, so that it may be truly said, to have *the promise of the Life that now is*, as well as of that which is to come.

The Effect both of present and future happiness is produced by Christianity—first—through the Gospel communication of certain truths of which it is in the highest degree important for us to be assured ; and secondly—by affording us a rule of conduct whereby we may be at peace, if
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not with the world, at least with God, and ourselves.

That there is a Supreme Being, the maker, and governor of all things, is indeed written in such legible characters through the whole volume of Creation, that scarce in any age, or country have men doubted of his existence, but so involved in obscurity were the reasonings even of the learned, so contradictory to each other their opinions concerning the divine attributes, that, until the coming of Christ, the human mind, ever actuated by its hopes and fears to the inquiry, found no sufficient authority on which it could securely rely.

Respecting even the divine providence, (however obvious it may now seem to infer, that he, who made the world by his power, should continue to govern it by his wisdom,) yet while men were left to their own conjectures, many difficulties presented themselves, and philosophers of no mean estimation maintained that the Ma-

jesty of God could not possibly submit to concern itself with such inconsiderable beings as we are.

But the Christian Revelation plainly assures us, that God superintends all our actions by his providence, and ordereth all things concerning them; that the good man is under his protection, and shall finally receive the reward of his patience and perseverance.

Can this assurance of the divine care and justice fail to inspire the true believer with a chearful resignation to the will of God, under a steady confidence, that whatever trial he may be exposed to, whatever accidents may befall him, it is still designed for his good, and will in the end turn to his advantage?

With respect also to the extent of God's mercy, Men in a state of nature were as much at a loss, as they were concerning his providence; they could at best have attained to an uncertain hope, that God possibly might pardon their offences upon
repentance

repentance and amendment of Life, that he certainly would do so, was far beyond the reach of their discovery, and a fearful expectation of wrath must have still aggravated the consciousness of Sin.

How unspeakably full of peace and comfort therefore, how worthy the divine messenger is the declaration, that God is merciful as he is just ! what a source of satisfaction is it to us to know, that if the heart be but sincere towards God the imperfections of nature will have a favourable allowance made for them, that our past transgressions shall be blotted out from the *Book of Life*, by the blood of him who hath redeemed by his death the repentant sinner, not only from the forfeitures of human frailty, but from the penalties also of actual guilt.

Strong indeed were the natural arguments in proof of the immortality of the Soul, yet while the knowledge of that important truth depended only on the conclusions of unassisted reason, the prospect

into that scene which lies beyond the grave was gloomy and melancholy.

The Gospel brought *Life and immortality* into the fullness of light, and happy would it be for the wicked, could the awful assurance of punishment as effectually deter them from sin, as the promise of reward encourages the pious Christian to persevere in the exercise of virtue.

Nor is Christianity less favourable to the particular happiness of its professors, than to the general interests of mankind, when considered as a rule of Life, and manners. Whoever candidly attends to its precepts will find that they are so far from encouraging the passions which disturb the peace of private life, or from giving countenance to a spirit of violence, tumult, or persecution, that they positively enjoin the practice of every moral virtue, which either tends to exalt human nature, or promote the interests of Society.

Herein, O Man, hath God shewed thee what is good, and what doth
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the Lord require of thee? but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. Such are the general outlines of the Christian's duty, and the fruits of his spiritual obedience are Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance; The state of mind composed of these affections, undisturbed by what is past, and secure of what is to come, affords perhaps the least splendid but the most solid and unmixed happiness to which human nature is capable of attaining. Be the lot of a good man acting under a religious Faith what it may, the influence of his principle will be found applicable to all the possible vicissitudes of Life.

After this plain account of the Character and tendency of our holy religion (which whoever will but candidly consult the scriptures will find confirmed in every part of them) little sure need be said in its defence against the groundless charge of its
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having more disturbed the peace of mankind, than promoted it.

*My kingdom, says Christ, is not of this world,** what then has his doctrine, or have his disciples to do with the spirit either of worldly interest, or ambition !

Men indeed of selfish views, to whose designs the assistance of the multitude was necessary, seeing their confidence could no other way so effectually be obtained, have frequently made profession of more than ordinary zeal for the interests of Christianity, and under the pretence of promoting God's glory, have availed themselves of the ignorant enthusiasm and passions of their followers, to the perpetration of crimes, which Christianity both reprobates and abhors.—*Whence then come Wars and Fighting among us, come they not hence, even of our lusts?*

Having stated what is the nature of that Peace spoken of in my text as the

* St. John, ch. xviii. ver. 36.

gift of Christ, I have only to remind you that the means whereby it is to be attained are Repentance, and Faith.

By the forced construction which the ignorance and conceit of some men, and the credulity of others have put upon the simplicity of the Gospel, many well intentioned minds have been distressed to comprehend what is meant by Faith; whereas the language of Scripture is plain, and easy, and if we will but take our notions of Faith from what the Gospel declares it to be, we shall find that it is not so hard a thing either to be understood, or practised, as numbers, who will not make the experiment, are apt to imagine.

Faith, as delivered by our Church according to the plain sense of the holy Scriptures, is indeed something more than a bare persuasion that Jesus is the Christ, or than a reliance upon, or application of his merits to ourselves. It implies repentance, and Repentance, besides a sorrow for sins past, requires a sincere resolution to conform

conform in our Life for the future to the precepts of the Gospel. Our Faith must be like that of the multitude at the preaching of the Apostles, of whom it is said, *that believing they turned unto the Lord*; not like that of Simon Magus, who although he believed concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, yet was assured by Peter *that he had neither part nor lot in the spirit, because his heart was not right in the sight of God.** *But*

The best means of knowing whether we have that faith which the Gospel requires is to examine into the nature and principles of our actions; as a tree is known by its fruit, so is the heart of a man by the good and evil conduct of his life. This is a test plain and easy to be understood, unless we wilfully deceive ourselves.

In recommending good works as the test of Faith, let it not be understood that we are to ground our confidence on their

* Acts, ch. viii. ver. 21.

excellence or perfection. When we have done the best we can, and may not be conscious of any enormous guilt, yet such is the imperfection of human nature, we cannot thereby be justified. A sense of our own unworthiness is nevertheless compatible with our confidence in God's mercy through Jesus Christ ; he expects not perfection in us but sincerity in our pursuit after righteousness, and thus much may every man know of his own heart.

Equally distant from the fatal extremes of presumption and despair is the true Christian Faith ; far from offering encouragement to obdurate guilt, it on the other hand leaves not the penitent sinner under the horrors of reprobation.

To such therefore as sensible of their own frailty have recourse to Almighty God for pardon and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and will comply with the terms proposed in the Gospel, we preach remission of Sins, that *being justified by Faith, they may have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

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excellence of perfection. When we have done the best we can, and may not be conscious of any enormous guilt, yet such is the imperfection of human nature, we cannot think it purified. A state of our own world, it is nevertheless compatible with our condition in God's mercy. Every man has his own heart, and every man has his own mind, and every man has his own will, and every man has his own power, and every man has his own strength, and every man has his own weakness, and every man has his own sin, and every man has his own redemption.

Heavenly Father, I am the first of the human race, and I am the last of the human race, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been born, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever died, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever lived, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever loved, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been loved, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been forgiven, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been saved.

To such a state as this of their own mind, I am the first of the human race, and I am the last of the human race, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been born, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever died, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever lived, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever loved, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been loved, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been forgiven, and I am the only one of the human race who has ever been saved.

SERMON X.

ST. LUKE,

Chapter xviii. Verse 14.

*I tell you, this Man went down to his house
justified rather than the other.*

HUMILITY, which consists in a modest sense of our own merit, and Charity, which disposes us to judge favourably of others, are, among the Virtues which adorn the Christian profession, most suitable to the frail condition of Human nature, and therefore most forcibly recommended to us by our Holy Religion.

We are frequently reminded in Scripture

ture that Man has nothing of his own wherein he may boast, as if he deserved it; whosoever therefore distinguished by any circumstance of superiority above his Brethren, overlooks the Giver of all Good things, and is forgetful of his own unworthiness, dishonours God by ingratitude towards his Benefactor, and by pride towards his Fellow Creatures.

Unreasonable however, and unbecoming as such a conduct is, the least experience or observation may convince us, how apt we are to take glory to ourselves, when it is due only to God.

It is done on almost every occasion of competition be the object contended for what it may. It is not only the conquest or the Rule of Nations, but the slightest distinction of pre-eminence, in talents, dress, or equipage, which are seen to make men unmindful of what they are, and (as it were) to justify them in their own conceit, for all the preference they arrogate in society. But,
O vain Man, what hast thou, that thou didst not
receive?

receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Reason, as well as Religion may convince us that there could be no claim whatever in any man, which might induce Providence, to place him in a more exalted station than the rest of his fellow-creatures, or bestow upon him any extraordinary powers of Body, or Mind; he who is endowed with such powers, is indeed naturally inclined to wish it were so; and when flattery indulges our inclinations we easily admit an error wherein there appears so much gratification.

The interests of Civil Society, even the very existence of it requires, that there should be a political subordination of rank, and authority, to which respect and deference are due; nor can they reasonably be withheld by any man who wishes well to the peace and prosperity of the State, under which he enjoys protection.

But I confine myself to those personal pretensions of which we are apt to be still more vain, though few if any can be per-

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suaded to hold them in the like estimation which we do ourselves.

If there is any human excellence which might assume a title to self-approbation, and a favourable comparison with other men, it is a Consciousness of Moral Rectitude in principle, and practice, as it is the highest perfection to which human nature can attain. Hereby we approach and are assimilated to that superior order of Beings, whose glory and delight it is to imitate their great Creator; while on the other hand, vicious habits debase us from the rank of Reasonable agents, to the level of Brutes.

Such being confessedly the constant effects of Virtue, and Vice; it may perhaps at first view appear contradictory to truth, and common sense, to tell a person, whose life is apparently regular and ostensibly full of good works, that another with less display of the like merit, may, from his greater humility and consciousness of his own imperfections, be more acceptable in the sight of God.

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This however is the doctrine of the Parable before us which the Evangelist expressly says, was addressed by our Lord to *certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, or as St. Paul describes them, who going about to establish their own righteousness, did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.**

In order to the better understanding the lesson intended to be conveyed by the Parable, I shall briefly distinguish the characters of the persons concerned.

The one is a Pharisee, of a sect the most considerable among the Jews, from an apparent sanctity of manners, and a scrupulous attention to the ceremonial law. The Pharisees fasted often, made long prayers in publick, were exact in the payment of their tythes, and distributed much alms among the poor; by these specious arts, they attained the object of their ambition, the approbation of the multitude, and a powerful influence in the state; but

* Ep. to Rom. ch. x. ver. 3.

as we learn from various passages of the New Testament, all this display of piety and benevolence was mere ostentation ; it had its source in Pride, and tended to Presumption.

The other Character was a Publican ; one of the officers employed in collecting the tribute imposed on the Jews, by the Romans. Impatient as the Jews are known to have been under every form of their own Government, it is not to be wondered at, that they submitted with much reluctance to the exactions of a foreign Power. The profession therefore of a Publican was odious to them, and the name a term of reproach.

Such were the Men who went up together to the temple to pray.

Let us next attend to the manner, and style of their address.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as this Publican ; I fast twice in the week, I give tythes of all I possess.—Where-

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in (may it be asked) is this address so reprehensible? The Pharisee is persuaded of his own righteousness by more than a mere opinion destitute of proof, he appeals to the regular conduct of his Life, he acknowledges that his virtues proceed from God, as he thanks him for them; he only prefers himself to the transgressors of the Law, and follows the general prejudice of his Country against the profession of a Publican.

Yet notwithstanding this specious apology, the Pharisee was guilty of Pride, Uncharitableness, and Presumption; he was conceited of his ritual observances, and arrogantly censorious against those who were less exact than himself in the ceremonies of the Law. But that wherein he was chiefly culpable, was his vain presumption in attempting to justify himself in the sight of God, by his moral virtues; *he trusted in himself that he was righteous*, and was above asking for mercy.

The Publican in the mean time standing

afar off and not daring so much as to lift up his eyes unto heaven, smote upon his breast and all he said was—*God be merciful to me a Sinner.*—So far was he from making a display of his merits, that he does not even mention them in extenuation of his guilt; conscious that he has nothing to offer sufficient for his justification, he dares not appeal to the justice of God, but throws himself entirely upon the mercy of his judge.

Such was the conduct of him *who went down to his house justified rather than the other.*

The sense of the Parable is too obvious to need a particular explanation, I shall only remind you therefore of the inferences resulting from it.

First—that it ill becomes us on partial comparisons to decide unfavourably of each other.

We may indeed in our civil capacity sometimes be under the necessity of proceeding to the condemnation of a Criminal

nal even to the loss of Life; yet it is with the utmost caution that an evil intention is admitted in a court of justice, even when the commission of the criminal act is ascertained, and the Law judges it better that a guilty man should sometimes escape, than that an innocent man should suffer unjustly.

But as individuals we have neither sufficient insight into, nor certain means of discerning the real character. *Judge not*, says our Lord, *according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*,* intimating that whenever we judge according to appearances only, we are in danger of judging unrighteously.

It was thus the Pharisee condemned the Publican, he knew the reproachful circumstances of his outward condition, but was a stranger to the rectitude of his Heart. It was thus when Mary Magdalen was weeping at our Saviour's feet, that our Lord was censured as ignorant of her

* St. John, ch. vii. ver. 24.

Character, her accusers knew the irregularity of her past conduct, but they knew not that she was then in the act of repentance.

Our judgment therefore formed from appearances only cannot be relied upon as certain. It should also be remembered, that we have no authority to condemn each other upon our own opinion of guilt; in our private capacity we are accountable to God alone; he only, who by his infinite knowledge can discern the secrets of the heart, and who, as our Creator, has a just right to exercise a sovereignty over all his creatures, is the proper judge of the world.

But to man it may be said, *who art thou that judgest another's Servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth.* Let not Christianity therefore be charged as productive of self-conceit, or censoriousness, the whole tenor of its precepts is directed to subdue pride, and every criminal affection arising from it, though it must be confessed, examples are but too common of such as affect to dignify

dignify their arrogance and calumny, with the plausible pretences of zeal for Virtue and Religion.

But the inference from the Parable which I would principally recommend to your consideration, is, that our hopes of acceptance hereafter cannot be founded on our own merits, seeing that it is by the gracious mercy of God alone through Jesus Christ, that Man is justified in his sight.

It has pleased the wise author of our being to implant in the human breast, a sense of good, and evil, and to give us Reason to guide our choice between them; but so turbulent are our passions that its still, small voice is but seldom heard, and even when it is heard, not attended to as it ought. They therefore who maintain the infallibility of Reason, and think it sufficient, to guide us to a state of immortality, and happiness, over-rate its excellence. Every Man's experience must convince him, that he is at best but a very imperfect being : As many as admit

mit the Scripture History of our first Parent's fall, are not at a loss to account for human infirmity ; and even they who cannot reconcile the fall of Man to the vain conceits of their own dignity, and to divine Justice, must still find frequent occasions to acknowledge their weakness, and propensity to evil. Alike applicable to the believer and the unbeliever is the confession of the Apostle, *that the good which he would, he frequently did not, and the evil which he would not, that he did.**

Whether therefore we consult Scripture or experience, either may serve to convince us, that whatever may be the primary cause of human infirmity, the effects of it are evident.

I recommend the consideration of this acknowledged truth most earnestly to your serious attention, because whoever is fully satisfied that he has no claim on God for a state of blessed immortality either from his nature or his merit, is almost persuaded

* Ep. to Rom. ch. vii. ver. 19.

to be a Christian. While the pride of self-sufficiency prevails, the Doctrine of a Redeemer, and divine Grace must appear unnecessary, and will therefore be deemed impossible to have proceeded from God, the death of Christ will be treated as of no effect, our preaching and your faith looked upon alike vain, and unprofitable.

How indeed God came at first to call forth into being a Creature formed as Man is, with such a portion of infirmity as must subject him to transgression, and expose him to the sentence denounced against disobedience, is a question which may naturally occur to the mind impressed with a true sense of its own imperfection; Scripture alone affords a solution of the difficulty. We collect from thence that after the angels had rebelled against God and fallen from their original state of Glory; God was pleased to create an inferior order of Beings, capable indeed of immortal happiness though not like the Angels admitted to it at once. Man was placed in Paradise in a
state

state of Probation, where proof might first be given of a disposition to acknowledge that whatever blessings he might enjoy, were derived from the free goodness of his Maker ; with this view was he formed, and declared good, adapted to the purposes of his being, and pure from actual evil ; nevertheless he must have been from the beginning subject to transgression, being left to the determination of his own free will, whether he would recognize the sovereignty of God by obedience to his command, or yield to the deceitful suggestions of the Tempter, under the flattering assurance of becoming independent. Yield he did, and thereby forfeited for himself and his posterity the claim of eternal life, obedience being the condition on which it was to be imparted, and that condition broken. It would be Folly, or Impiety to suppose that God, to whom all things to come are alike known as all things present, or past, should not have foreseen the fatal consequence of human frailty.

How

How then, (it may be asked) was the experiment consistent with Divine Wisdom, Goodness, or Justice?—Reason may be at a loss for an answer, but Revelation assures us, that the Redemption of Man through Jesus Christ, made a part in the general design of the Creation, and was *foreordained before the foundation of the world*.*—Admitting then, that God did foreknow, and permit the fall of our first Parent, yet he foreknew, and had prepared in Jesus Christ, the means of our Restoration to the like conditional state of acceptance.

The whole history of God's dealings towards us appears to unfold a wise, and gracious purpose, of humbling the heart of Man, lest he should rebel presumptuously against his Creator.

We must therefore conclude that a just sense of our own unworthiness is the fundamental principle of a Christian's knowledge, and Duty; it directs us to place our

* 1st Ep. of St. Peter, ch. i. ver. 20.

chief confidence in the co-operation of the Holy Spirit; whose aid is promised to all those who earnestly seek it, and which alone can make perfect our weakness.

I cannot conclude without mentioning one necessary caution. Let it not be imagined, that because our very best actions are defective, moral virtue is therefore of no estimation in the sight of God, or that Faith in the sufferings of Christ will dispense with our endeavours, or supersede our obligations to Holiness. The Conditions imposed upon Man in his first estate required a conformity in his conduct with whatever was right, and pleasing to the Author of his Being. The coming of Christ was to restore us again to the divine favour, which the transgression of those conditions in a particular instance of disobedience had forfeited, and to render our endeavours after righteousness (imperfect as they still may be) acceptable to God. But because the mercy of God through the merits of Jesus Christ no longer imputes to

us the disobedience of Adam, shall our own wilfulness pass unpunished? *and are we to sin that Grace may abound?*—*God forbid!*

Let us on the contrary uniformly strive after a Life of Holiness and Virtue, humbling ourselves before God; when we have done our best, we shall find but too much cause to exclaim, as the Publican did, *God be merciful to me a Sinner!* Who is there among us, if at this moment summoned to the tribunal of God, could dare with the Pharisee to ask for Justice, rather than Mercy?

Righteous only art thou, O Lord, who in mercy hast appointed for us such means of Salvation as are altogether suitable to our Nature and thy Glory.

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SERMON XI.

ST. LUKE,

Chapter xvi. Verse 8.

The Children of this World are, in their generation, Wiser than the Children of Light.

THE Parable which gave occasion to this reflection of our Saviour relates, that an unjust Steward was accused of wasting his Master's goods, and consequently threatened with dismissal.

Aware of his situation, and fearful of the distress impending, he called to him his Lord's Debtors, and remitting to each a part of what was owing by them, he
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hoped this indulgence would so far conciliate their favour, that they might be induced to receive him into their houses; his Lord commended the precaution;—then follows the remark of my text, *that the Children of this World are, in their generation, Wiser than the Children of Light.*

It is obvious to the slightest experience, that the generality of Men, in their temporal concerns, act on such principles as they judge most conducive to the point at which they aim, while in the more important pursuits of Eternity, few are found who adapt their conduct to their conviction, or their interest. This inconsistency our Saviour plainly alludes to, and reproves.

It is my intention after explaining the distinction of terms, *Children of this World*, and *Children of Light*, to shew wherein the former excel the latter, and to exhort you to imitate their prudence, and precaution.

The Children of this World, are they whose affections are set upon the enjoyments

ments of this Life, who propose to themselves, as the greatest possible happiness, the gratification of their sensual appetites, the improvement of their fortune, or the attainment of some favourite object of ambition.

These are the prevailing considerations which influence Mankind in general, and were we not every one of us sensible of the struggle there still is, or has been in our own breast, to regulate our desires, and proportion them to the real worth of the object; it would be hardly credible, that a rational and enlightened creature, as Man is, capable of judging and choosing at all, should judge so ill, and make so bad a choice.

All worldly enjoyments are confessedly uncertain both in their nature and duration ; and (setting aside the danger of excess, and the criminality to which they expose us,) no doubt can be admitted, but that if they forsake not us, we must soon forsake them.

The religious expectation of a future state, founded upon the authority of God's word, proposes blessings to our obedience inestimable in value, and lasting as eternity; yet notwithstanding all the lessons of experience and reflection, and all the arguments supporting our faith, the present life, short as it is, has a preference in the general esteem to the glorious state of immortality and perfection, in a life to come.

The temporal interests and the passions of Mankind, are the impulses which for the most part actuate them, for these it is that Men rise up early, and late take rest, eating the bread of carefulness. To what other end is all that hurry, that eagerness of industry and competition, which is seen in the world, than for the world itself, who shall have the largest share, and make the greatest figure in it; to these attainments, the common principles of education, and the ordinary counsels of parental affection are chiefly directed. Is it not
too

too with this view, that in a more advanced state of Life, connections are formed, and maintained, at the hazard of innocence and integrity, sometimes at the expence of happiness itself?

This attachment to sensible objects has been the prevailing folly of past ages, as it is still of our own; there have ever been too many, *who took not God for their strength, but made Gold their hope, and trusted in the multitude of their riches.*—Such are *the Children of this World.*

In the midst however of much darkness, some there have been, and God be praised! there still are many, who shine forth as *Children of Light*, who extend their view beyond the prospect of this life, and propose to themselves, for their principal pursuit, the attainment of Life Eternal.

Every sincere and decided Christian conceives that he is born to nobler expectations than this World can fulfil; he looks forward beyond the grave to an

inheritance of glory that will never fade, to the possession of treasures which neither fraud nor violence can take from him, neither age nor accident destroy. Wherein then could our Saviour find cause to censure the conduct of such a Man, in declaring that *the Children of this World* were Wiser than *the Children of Light*.

That we may not mistake the true sense and extent of the observation, it is necessary to be remarked, that the commendation given by the Lord to his Steward, did not apply to his dishonest means of conciliating friends, but merely to the prudence of his precaution, in preparing against the day of his distress.

Nor does our Saviour declare that *the Children of this World* are absolutely Wise, but Wiser only *in their Generation*, that is, as far as this Life only is concerned : In the choice of their end, or their mode of attaining it, they cannot be thought to act wisely, unless they can first prove that there is no distinction of right and wrong,
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no resurrection of the dead to judgment. Wise indeed even in this respect are they in their own conceit, and pity others, who thrive less well in the World, or do not enjoy its pleasures, to the same extent as themselves, more for their folly, than for their poverty, or misery; but whatever may be their own, or the common opinion, there is nothing in the words of our Saviour, which can be wrested to approve their choice, or the unjust means whereby they may accomplish their purposes: in these respects, it is plain still, as St. Paul observes, *that the wisdom of the World is foolishness with God.*

But, notwithstanding that the charge of folly bears full on the imprudence of their choice, and that the means they employ may not always be just, yet whoever attends to their earnestness in prosecuting their object, must perceive that they apply themselves with more zeal and perseverance to their pursuits, than *the Children of Light* usual-

ly display in seeking the blessings of Eternity.

Men devoted to their sensual pleasures, or worldly interests, are not apt to entertain doubts, or be discouraged at every little difficulty which may obstruct their success. Where certainty cannot be had, they proceed with confidence upon probability; the Husbandman knoweth, that it is not always the choice of the seed, nor the favourable season in which he sows it, that will insure him a plentiful harvest. It is not the number of forces, the experience of their commander, their discipline, or courage, that can make victory certain. Can the skill of the Physician give more than probable hopes of a recovery? Yet in these and other the most interesting of our worldly concerns, Men are decided in their opinion, and proceed with confidence.

But do *the Children of Light* act thus?—
Are they not perplexed with every doubt which the Sophistry of infidelity throws in
their

their way? and even while they still admit the testimony of God's word, that their endeavours shall at length be crowned with success, are they not cool, and irresolute in their devotions?

Again *the Children of this World* are seen to prefer their interest and their pleasure to all other considerations whatever; though their end is false, they are true to it, and adhere to it at any rate; they will forego present gratifications, mortify their passions, deny themselves rest, and (may I not add,) they will too often sacrifice their opinion, and their integrity, to gain a point of distinction, profit, or advancement.

But are *the Children of Light* so readily disposed to give up their inclinations, and to break into the hours of rest for their devotions? While the worldling employs the whole week in his temporal concerns, is it not with reluctance they can be prevailed upon, to set apart one day in seven to the glory and worship of God?

How attentive also are *the Children of this World*

World to avail themselves of every opportunity that offers, to promote their wishes ; it is with them a common maxim, that the tide of wealth and honour must be taken at the flood ; they seize therefore the first favourable moment in making haste to be rich, or great ; and herein they certainly do wisely, in esteeming the time present, as that only of which they are masters, and therefore trusting not to the uncertainties of futurity.

But what is more common than for men who believe, and acknowledge a life of purity necessary to the attainment of everlasting happiness, still to put off their repentance from day to day, as if the issue of life, were in their own power.

The last instance I shall mention of worldly wisdom is that which more immediately gave occasion to our Saviour's remark, namely, the provision which *the Children of this World* are careful in making against the evils which threaten them.

Happy would it be for *the Children of Light,*

Light, could they too be persuaded to use the like precaution, and make provision in time for those comforts which the Soul will surely stand in need of we know not how soon.—Await not then till sickness and old age shall warn you of approaching dissolution, but set about the necessary task of repentance and amendment ere *the night cometh, in which no man can work*. Trust not, that the dim lamp of Life, while it expires over the bed of sickness, will yield sufficient light to cheer the departing spirit, till it shall have made its peace with God; it will then stand in need of every consolation, and the reflection of a well-spent Life will be among the first. How can the eye of Faith look forward for forgiveness, unless the review of what is past afford some reason to hope for mercy?

It is in vain to urge any arguments from the consideration of a future state to men who lost in worldly pursuits disclaim all interest in it. Their reasoning is just, *let us eat, drink, and be merry*, if they are satisfied

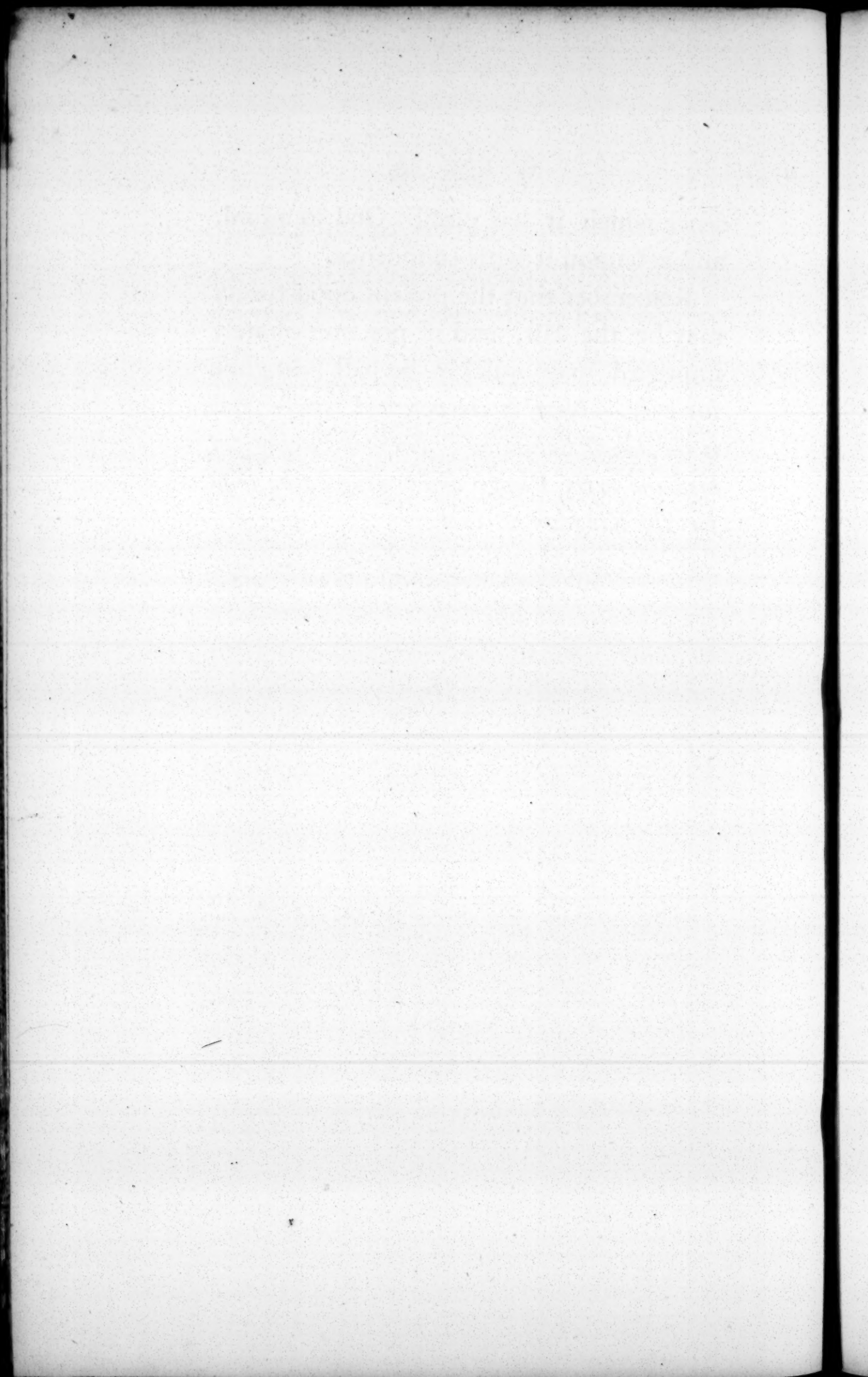
fied that *to-morrow they are to die, never more to live*. But for one who disbelieves the resurrection from any thing like conviction, thousands there are who still believe, and tremble.

You who hear me this day, acknowledge by your presence at the service of the Church, that you have other notions of God, and Eternity; to you, who believe there is a God, and that he is the *rewarder of them who seek him*, I address myself with greater confidence of success, when I exhort you, to consider, that knowledge, and conviction are but aggravating circumstances of guilt, if they are suffered to lie buried in the heart, and bring not forth the fruit of Holiness.

Consider this, ye who know God, and are backward in practising your duty towards him. In the pursuit of Eternal happiness, give it not a speculative, but an active preference; be guided by such maxims as are the ordinary principles of worldly wisdom; be content with the evidence

dence which it has pleased God to afford, and act upon it with confidence.

Remember that the present opportunity may be the last, and if not immediately improved may quickly be past and gone for ever.—*Now is the accepted time—Now is the day of Salvation. No man having put his hand to the Plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.*



SERMON XII.

EPISTLE *to the* ROMANS,

Chapter iii. Verse 29.

*Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not
also of the Gentiles?*

IT is the peculiar excellence of the Christian dispensation that it extends the blessings of divine goodness and mercy to the whole race of Mankind. In the light in which the Gospel represents him, *God is no respecter of Persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.** From the universal Pa-

* Acts, ch. x. ver. 34, 35.

rent of all created beings, Impartial Benevolence may reasonably be expected; it is an attribute of perfection suitable to the notions we naturally form of his infinite Justice.

The Scriptures however have in this respect been charged with contradicting themselves, as if what we are required to believe of God's Nature was irreconcilable with the History they give of his dealings with the Sons of Men.

The advocates for Infidelity have with an air of triumph asserted, that either God did not reveal himself to the descendants of Abraham in the particular manner related in the Old Testament, or that if he did, he therein favoured one nation inconsistently with the impartiality ascribed to him in the New Testament.

Every Christian acknowledges the Jewish religion to have its appointment from God; it must be confessed likewise that the institution was confined to one small people possessing but an inconsiderable portion of the earth in comparison with the mighty
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Empires of the East.—Its limitation we grant to be expressly asserted in the Holy Scriptures : *He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes, and his judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any other nation, neither have the Heathen knowledge of his Laws.**

My intention nevertheless is, to shew, that notwithstanding the title of God's peculiar People, which the Jews so vainly arrogated to themselves, they were ever dealt with according to the ordinary course of divine Justice, and (which is the most important, and interesting part of the inquiry) that the rest of Mankind were equally comprehended with them in the gracious design, and glorious accomplishment of that dispensation which was delivered by their Prophets.

From the whole tenor of the Law, and the several obligations imposed upon the Jews, it is evident that the main object for which they were separated, and kept distinct from the nations around them, was

* Psalm cxlviii. ver. 19, 20.

to further the purpose of divine wisdom and goodness, in making known the Messiah in due time.

In the conduct, and promotion of this gracious purpose it pleased God indeed to effect by signs and wonders their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, yet he suffered them soon after for their perverseness to wander in the wilderness, and remain there forty years.

He fed them, it is true, when they cried to him in their distress, with bread from heaven, yet for the punishment of their crimes he sent fiery serpents among them, the Earth opened and swallowed them up.

Though he drove out the Heathen and gave them their Land in possession, a land in comparison of the wilderness wherein their forefathers had sojourned, *flowing with milk and honey*, yet was it not comparable with many other parts of the Earth for healthfulness, and fertility, nor did they ever possess it long in peace or security; and lest they might still presume on the particular interposition of God's Providence,

dence, it was expressly declared to them,
*Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness
 of thine heart dost thou go to possess their Land ;
 but for the wickedness of these Nations, the
 Lord thy God doth drive them out before thee,
 and that he may perform the word which the
 Lord swore unto thy Fathers Abraham, Isaac,
 and Jacob. Understand therefore that the
 Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to
 possess it for thy righteousness.**

Their National prosperity was the temporary consequence of publick virtues ; and whenever they turned aside (as they frequently did) from doing what was right, and pleasing in the sight of God, National Calamity ever followed, their country was laid waste, their fenced cities were broken down, and their Sons and their Daughters were led into Captivity.

By a special revelation a more distinct knowledge of God's nature and will was indeed imparted to the Jews than to the rest of the world ; but at the same time

* Deut. ch. ix. ver. 5, 6.

the burthen of a ceremonial law was imposed upon them, attended with so many difficulties in the observance of it, that St. Paul styles it, a ministry of *Death, and Condemnation*,* presenting to men's consciences an obligation hard to be complied with in the degree of perfection required, and yet expressly denouncing curses on him *that continued not in all things to do them.*

The Apostle justly argues farther concerning this special revelation, which at first view appears to be such a mark of extraordinary Grace, that they had no reason to be proud of the distinction; for since it had not produced in them an improvement proportionably greater than what the light of reason, and the law of nature had brought forth in other men, it was in consequence rather to be considered as a disadvantage, as it rendered their crimes more inexcusable, and their condition worse than that of ignorance.

The Jews nevertheless under these cir-

* Second Ep. to Cor. ch. iii. ver. 7, 9.

cumstances were highly conceited of their own pre-eminence, and despised the rest of mankind as unworthy of God's favour; but so far was this imaginary dignity from procuring them either admiration, respect, or esteem among the other nations of the earth, that they have been in every age the pitiable objects of popular dislike, from the pride of their pretensions, the peculiarity of their manners, and ever since the time when they rejected the Messiah, from the wretchedness of their condition as a people.

These considerations are sufficient to shew that there is no ground for charging God with unjust partiality to the Jewish nation.

But the truth of this conclusion will more fully appear, if we contemplate the comprehensive view of the Christian dispensation.

The first promise of a Redeemer was made in the most general terms, *that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent* ;* or in other words, that there should spring from her who had been seduced into

* Gen. ch. iii. ver. 15.

transgression one who should hereafter overcome the wiles of our deceitful Enemy, and render his malice of none effect. In process of time, God was pleased to reveal more particularly to Abraham in reward for his faith and obedience, that he should be the Father of a nation from which was to come the Messiah ; it was nevertheless at the same time declared that the gracious effects of his coming should not be confined to the Jewish nation, but be of universal concern and advantage. *In thy seed shall all the nations of the Earth be blessed.** In this general sense was the promise understood by Jacob, when in the spirit of Prophecy he said, *unto him shall the gatherings of the people be.†* The Angel who proclaimed the Birth of Christ, announced *tidings of great joy to all people—Peace on Earth* (not to the Land of Judea only, but to the uttermost ends of the world) *and good will to all Mankind.* In this light it

* Gen. ch. xxvi. ver. 4.

† Gen. ch. xlix. ver. 10.

was that Simeon, who looked for the consolation of Israel, beheld the day of the Lord, *Mine Eyes*, said he, *have seen thy Salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of thy People Israel.* We may therefore, and we are bound still to acknowledge that *Salvation is of the Jews*, to them primarily pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God and the Promises, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, was the personal ministry of Christ himself principally directed, but not confined in its effects; *our Lord was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the Fathers, and that the Gentiles also might glorify God for his mercy.*

Since then the Descendants of Abraham according to the flesh were chosen, not as peculiar objects of divine favour, but as instruments only in the hands of Providence, for furthering the dispensation of mercy to all Mankind, since as many as

are believers in the true God, and in his Son Jesus Christ, are Children of Abraham by faith, and joint-heirs of the promise, it is the folly, or the falsehood of infidelity to charge God with partiality, or injustice.

Few men indeed besides the Jews themselves, can now think, that *God is the God of the Jews only*; disappointed in their vain hopes of worldly superiority, they are in every Country where they inhabit regarded as aliens to the rest of Mankind, and have been too frequently treated with illiberal scorn, and cruel persecutions; *their plagues have been wonderful, and of long continuance.*

It is not therefore the name of Jew, or Gentile, the nation or family we are of, that is of any account in the sight of God; the partition wall was broken down *when the grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, appeared unto all Men alike, henceforth the same Lord over all is rich in mercy and goodness unto all that call upon him.*

Having, I trust, sufficiently established the title which we, who are not of the stock
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of Abraham, have to a part in the Messiah, let us advert to the nature and condition of the benefits we are to expect through his intercession.

These are forgiveness of sin, and everlasting life upon faith and repentance. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to the end that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

But it may be asked, if *there is no other name given under Heaven whereby Men shall be saved* than the name of Jesus Christ, how comes it to pass, that before, and since the promulgation of the Gospel Salvation, millions after millions have passed away without ever hearing of it at all? If whole nations have been and still are suffered to die in ignorance and sin, where is that universal benevolence, that impartial gift of mercy contended for in this discourse.

It must be acknowledged that great still is the mystery of our redemption. Evident indeed is the display of divine
power

power in the creation, and visible are the effects of God's providence in the preservation, and order of the world, but the extent of his mercy, in restoring sinful Man to a state of acceptance, is what *by searching* we never could have found out, nor has he submitted to our judgment the fitness of the means whereby he hath effected our Salvation. Sufficient is it for us to know the things that concern ourselves, and that God hath no where prescribed the benefits of our Saviour's death within those limits of time and place, which bound the publication of the Gospel. It becomes us to have implicit confidence in the truth and justice of the assurance, that every man shall hereafter be judged *according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not.** He will not be the object of mercy, or wrath, in proportion to the degree of knowledge, but of improvement made of the situation, and cir-

* Second Ep. to Cor. ch. viii. ver. 12.

cumstances in which Providence may have placed him.

Here then let us set bounds to our speculative curiosity, and contemplate, with humility and confidence, the divine attributes of justice and mercy.

How far our own conduct is consistent with the knowledge imparted to us, is a subject much more becoming and interesting in the inquiry, as well as attended with less difficulty in the solution.

Be the degree of indulgence what it may which it shall please God, at the great day of final retribution, to make to those nations who have lived under the light of nature only. We, to whom a fuller measure of knowledge, and a distinct rule of duty has been given, have certainly no claim or just expectation to be included in it.

When the Jews rejected the Salvation offered to them in the gospel, Christ declared that their guilt arose from their neglecting the grace which was tendered to them, *that had he not come, and spoken to them,*

them, had he not in proof of his divine commission done among them the things which none other Man did, they had not had sin.—*The same conclusion is applicable to ourselves. Had we never heard of the truths of Christianity, nor had the testimonies of its divine authority been transmitted down to us, our ignorance might have been our apology; but if in this Country the Gospel is hid, *it is hid unto them that are lost.*

If therefore conceited of a vain philosophy, and affecting to be wise above that which is written in the Holy Scriptures, we wilfully resist the truth, if hurried on in the giddy round of dissipation and folly, we give it not the attention due to its importance, if devoted to the pursuits of worldly interest, we admit not its influence to regulate our conduct,—We are of all Men most guilty here, and may justly expect to be most miserable hereafter.

* St. John, ch. xv. ver. 22, 24.

SERMON XIII.

The FORTY-SECOND PSALM,

Verfes 14, 15.

*Why art thou vexed, O my Soul ! and why
art thou fo disquieted within me ? O put
thy trust in God.*

AMONG the various distreffes incident to human nature, there is none more deferving of compassion, than the melancholy depression of fpirits, to which devout and well-meaning Men are frequently fubject, from mifconceived notions of Religion.

Christianity in its genuine fimplicity is to Man for the joy of his heart, and the
ends

ends proposed by it are Peace, Comfort, and Satisfaction in the present life, eternal happiness in that which is to come.

Whence is it then that its effects are so often contrary to its principles? and that what its divine author intended as the remedy for our infirmities, should in some instances operate as a Poison? The adulteration of its purity, by the gross additions of Superstition, and Fanaticism, is the cause of this unhappy perversion in its effect.

The natural consequence of that indiscreet, and mistaken zeal which insists on constant penances, and such harsh rules of discipline as check the most innocent inclinations of the human mind, is either infidelity, or despair.

It is next to impossible for a man who is above the lowest class of ignorance, to persuade himself, that God, his maker and preserver, can be the author of such extreme severities as have obtained, and still continue in many parts of the world to disgrace

disgrace not only the Heathen systems of worship, but the profession of Christianity itself.

Hence it is, that the half-enlightened Sinner, without inquiring into the distinctions of Religion, and searching the Holy Scriptures for the genuine words of Eternal Life uncorrupted by the conceits of Men, listens eagerly to the specious sophistry of false Philosophy, till his Reason is seduced to justify the indulgence of Passion, and the remonstrances of conscience are stifled by a hasty conclusion, that either there is no God, or that if there is, he is unconcerned at the actions of Men.

We must have recourse to one or other of these principles to account for the conduct of the fashionable multitude, who disregarding the most reasonable restraints of religion give themselves up to the pursuits of Pleasure, in the gratification of their appetites, and affect to pity those who live otherwise for being as they conceive
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certainly miserable here, lest they may eventually be miserable hereafter.

Fanaticism on the other hand renouncing every attempt at actual merit, and recommending Faith as the only standard of perfection, addresses itself to the imagination for the proof of its sufficiency.

Some few there may be of so warm a temper, and so weak a judgment, as easily to flatter themselves into vain conceits of security; who, grounding their confidence on certain inexplicable feelings, mistake the fervors of a heated imagination for sensible assurances of divine favor.

Unhappily for those of a colder constitution, who are nevertheless ready to listen to every bold declaimer, and to be carried away by every wind of doctrine, notwithstanding a willing disposition to believe they cannot cease to tremble; unable to excite like fanciful sensations of divine inspiration and assurance, they impute the want of them to their own utter reprobation, and therefore conceiving themselves
rejected

rejected of God, and doomed to perdition, sink into melancholy and despair.

I have mentioned these mistaken notions of Religion principally with a view of shewing, that their effects are not to be imputed to Christianity but to the abuse of it.

The immediate intent of this discourse is to remove a more general disorder of the mind, and I trust one of a less obstinate nature than either infidelity, or despair. I mean to allay, and quiet those scruples of conscience, and fits of despondency, under which Pious Christians are occasionally apt to labour.

Various are the doubts and fears of this nature;—the principal of which I will speak to.

Some are apt to distract their mind with dreadful apprehension, that they may have offended God beyond the hope of Pardon.

There is certainly such a desperate state, into which Men may fall by an obstinate

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perseverance in Sin, as at length to be rejected of the Almighty, and cast off as objects of his wrath—*My spirit, saith God, shall not always strive with Man.*

But Presumption, and a Disregard of Consequences, not Fear, and Anxiety are the symptoms of that dreadful case; the hardened sinner, when the spirit of God hath withdrawn its influence, goes on carelessly in his wickedness, feeling no sorrow for what is past, and regardless of what is to come.

So long as the dread of God's wrath prevails, the seeds of Piety are still alive in the heart, and if properly cherished may under God's blessing happily bring forth the fruits of Holiness to eternal Life.

Painful indeed will be the struggles of the soul for that birth of Righteousness by which it is to enter into the kingdom of God. An humiliating sense of Guilt, and the danger of relapse into iniquity may and ought to alarm the penitent sinner, excite his vigilance, animate

animate his resolution, and dispose him to pray to God without ceasing for the aids of Grace,—but ought not to oppress his mind with despair. The Gospel plainly teacheth, that to him who is sincere in his sorrow, God is boundless in mercy, *though his sins be red as Scarlet, they shall become white as snow*, though they be more in number than the stars of Heaven, God will in his mercy through Jesus Christ pardon them, whenever the Sinner turneth unto him with his whole heart, *when he ceaseth to do evil, and learns to do well; For it is indeed a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Others there are who firmly believe, that God is willing to receive all who truly turn unto him; they are sensible of their past iniquities and sincerely penitent; but still finding themselves occasionally subject to errors, and infirmities, doubt the sincerity of their repentance.

But let him, who is thus depressed in

spirit, take comfort from the following reflection.

Those very doubts which he entertains of his sincerity, are indisputable proofs of it; for he surely is in earnest to please God, who thinks he does not please him so much as he ought to do. God will be slow to judge him who is ever ready to condemn himself, so that there is little danger he should ultimately err from the path of life, who is troubled at every step whereby he declines from it.

Humiliating as the self-conviction of our own infirmities may justly be, yet so far is it from being a ground of despondency, that it is the very disposition of mind required in the Gospel; it renders us fit objects of God's gracious assistance, by inducing us to fly to him for help, and to rest our confidence on his mercy.

The last kind of Religious fears which I propose to speak of, is occasioned by the doubts which oppress the mind of the humble Christian, lest his Repentance having

ing arisen from no other motive than the dread of punishment should therefore not be acceptable in the sight of God.

We are indeed taught both by Scripture and Reason, that it is our duty to Love God as well as to Fear him ; yet, is it not specified that our worship, and obedience, must arise from any one particular principle ; while fear indeed remains the only motive to piety, it is evident that however right our first step may be, we have made but little progress in our religious course ; Perseverance nevertheless by degrees, as it renders Religion familiar to the heart, will in like proportion render it easy and pleasing, till Love, Hope, and Gratitude, till every cheerful and generous affection will by turns be engaged in the exercise of our duties. To render God the honour due unto his name, from a sense of the relation we bear to him as our Creator and Preserver, to practise Virtue from mere love of it, independently of either hope or fear, would indeed be a very exalted mode of worship,
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and human nature actuated only by such motives would become more perfect than it is.

Angels, and those superior orders of Beings who are admitted to the immediate presence of the Almighty may possibly be altogether retained in their Duty, by the rectitude of their moral affections ; yet lovely, and desirable as Virtue may be represented by those who argue for the sufficiency of human nature, how many Men are there who have neither eyes to see its beauty, nor hearts to desire it.

Wise, and Merciful therefore is God, who knowing how insensible our Nature is to such refined notions, has been pleased not only to instruct our Reason in what our Duty consists, but moreover incites us to the discharge of it, by the most powerful motives of passion, and affection.

Eternal Happiness is proposed in the Holy Scripture, as the reward of our obedience, to quicken our hope and animate our desires. Eternal Misery is denounced in all its terrors against impenitence, to
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alarm the conscience, and bring the sinner back to his right senses.

It is then of little consequence what motive first sets us forward provided we persist in the right way. Be the first principle of our obedience what it may, God will accept it, if it is but active and sincere. *Why then art thou vexed, O my Soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?*

Having thus considered the nature of those religious scruples which most commonly distract, and oppress the penitent Christian, and as I trust, shewn the unreasonableness of being overcome by them, I have only to recommend to your attention and practice the precept in the remaining part of my text, "*Put thy trust in God.*"

The leading Character, and main scope of Christianity is to make Man renounce his own sufficiency, and place his trust in God's mercy through Jesus Christ; then is it efficacious, when a just sense of infirmity and unworthiness is produced in the human breast; then is it, that the divine promise holds forth an assurance of accept-

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ance, and Revelation comes in aid of Reason, not only to confirm God's attributes of Goodness, Justice, and Mercy, but to point out the rock of our Salvation.

That Rock is Christ.—*Come unto me, says the Saviour of the world, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.†—Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.†—Is this the language of Despair? Is it not the voice of Him that bringeth glad tidings of great Joy, that speaketh Peace, and Good-will towards Men?*

Let then the humble Christian look up with pious confidence to the mercy seat of God; let him hold fast his faith in the merits of his Redeemer, nothing doubting but that he who has begun a good work in him will in due time bring it to perfection, *so that whoso fainteth not, shall in the end come off even more than Conqueror.*

* St. Matthew, ch. xi. ver. 28.

†† St. Matthew, ch. v. ver. 3, 4.

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Let it however be remembered, that the intent of this discourse, is confined to the relief, and encouragement of penitent sinners, who not finding at once all the success they look for in their devotions, are suddenly cast down, and inclined to despair of God's mercy.

Neither Comfort, nor Security can be derived from it to those who wilfully persist in the practice of any known vice, even though they may sometimes feel occasional checks of Conscience, and be touched with temporary apprehensions of divine wrath. —I mean not to speak Peace, where there ought to be no Peace.

I trust that I am not addressing myself in this congregation to a single impenitent Sinner; if such a one there be, would to God! that I could set before him the Terrors of the Lord with all the force of Reason and power of Eloquence which made Felix tremble. Would to God! I could display in its true colours, the tremendous scenes of that awful day, when the secrets

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of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the sinner be brought to face his offended Judge, under all the conscious horrors of Guilt, and Impenitence.

Happy would it be for the Unrepenting sinner could his Fears be now awakened, could he be now persuaded to turn from the evil of his ways, while the arms of Mercy are still open to receive him.

Let such a Man, if at length he be struck with remorse, first go weep; but let him not weep as those without hope. Let him sow in tears, he may by God's grace yet reap in Joy.

To day if he hear the voice of the Lord, let him not again harden his heart, lest henceforth the spirit of God be withdrawn, and hereafter strive no more with him; lest Death come upon him unawares, and the *Book of Life* be closed for ever.



F I N I S.

